

the author of **THE SHOW OF VIOLENCE** and **DARK LEGEND**

SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT

Fredric Wertham, M. D.

*the influence of
comic books on today's youth*

SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT

by
*Fredric
Wertham, M.D.*

This is the most shocking book of recent years. And it should be the most influential.

Seduction of the Innocent is the complete, detailed report of the findings of famed psychiatrist, Fredric Wertham, on the pernicious influence of comic books on the youth of today. No parent can afford to ignore it.

You think your child is immune? Don't forget — 90,000,000 comic books are read each month. You think they are mostly about floppy-eared bunnies, attractive little mice and chipmunks? Go take a look.

On the basis of wide experience and many years' research, Dr. Wertham flatly states that comic books:

- Are an invitation to illiteracy
- Create an atmosphere of cruelty and deceit
- Stimulate unwholesome fantasies
- Suggest criminal or sexually abnormal ideas
- Create a readiness for temptation
- Suggest forms a delinquent impulse may take and supply details of technique

These are only some of the points raised — and documented.

Dr. Wertham also discusses many other deeply disturbing questions. He has found that comic books harm the development of reading from the lowest level of the most

continued on back flap





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**Seduction
of the
Innocent**

SEDUCTION of the INNOCENT

Fredric Wertham, M.D.

author of

THE BRAIN AS AN ORGAN
DARK LEGEND
THE SHOW OF VIOLENCE

 **Rinehart** & COMPANY, INC.

NEW YORK TORONTO

*Part of the material in this book appeared
in somewhat different form in the Ladies' Home
Journal under the title of "What Parents Don't
Know About Comic Books."*

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SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT

publisher's note

This book, *Seduction of the Innocent*, is the result of seven years of scientific investigation conducted by Dr. Fredric Wertham. He has had long experience in technical research and was the first psychiatrist to be awarded a fellowship by the National Research Council. From his studies on the brain came an authoritative textbook, *The Brain as an Organ*, used all over the world. His clinical investigations resulted in the discovery of a new mental disease now incorporated in leading psychiatric textbooks.

Dr. Wertham was senior psychiatrist for the Department of Hospitals in New York City from 1932 to 1952, directed the mental hygiene clinics at Bellevue Hospital and Queens Hospital Center, and was in charge of the Court of General Sessions Psychiatric Clinic. For over twenty-five years Dr. Wertham has been giving expert opinion in medico-legal cases. His advice has been sought by defense counsels, district attorneys, judges and legislators. His views have been discussed before state and Federal courts, including the U. S. Supreme Court in Washington. An "expert opinion" by a psychiatrist is an opinion based on *facts*, facts that can be demonstrated and proved.

This book, thoroughly documented by facts and cases, gives the substance of Dr. Wertham's expert opinion on the effects that comic books have on the minds and behavior of children who come in contact with them. He has studied all the varieties

of comic books. His findings are presented, therefore, against the background of *all* kinds of comic books. He has directed this book specifically at crime comic books which he defines as those “comic books that depict crime, whether the setting is urban, Western, science-fiction, jungle, adventure or the realm of supermen, ‘horror’ or supernatural beings.”

Acknowledgments

I am greatly indebted to the many adults and children who have actively helped me in this study. They have sent me comic books, drawn my attention to television programs, corroborated, amplified or criticized my writings and referred cases for treatment in my clinics. My thanks are due especially to the psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, social workers, psychologists, teachers and clerical helpers who make up the indefatigable and unselfish staff of the Lafargue Clinic, especially Dr. Hilde L. Mosse. I am also grateful to the staff of the Mental Hygiene Clinic of the Queens General Hospital and the staff of the Quaker Emergency Service Readjustment Center, all of whom have been helpful and whose work aided in making this study possible.

I would like also to express my thanks to the hundreds of people who have written me letters from all over the world, only a few of which I have been able to answer and for most of whom this is my first grateful acknowledgment.

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author's note

ONLY THE COMIC-BOOK CHARACTERS IN THIS
BOOK ARE FICTITIOUS. ALL THE OTHERS ARE REAL.

“Such Trivia As Comic Books”

Introducing the Subject

“And I verily do suppose that in the braines and hertes of children, whiche be membres spirituall, whiles they be tender, and the little slippes of reason begynne in them to bud, ther may happe by evil custome some pestiferous dewe of vice to perse the sayde membres, and infecte and corrupt the softe and tender buddes.”

*—Sir Thomas Elyot
(1531)*

Gardening consists largely in protecting plants from blight and weeds, and the same is true of attending to the growth of children. If a plant fails to grow properly because attacked by a pest, only a poor gardener would look for the cause in that plant alone. The good gardener will think immediately in terms of general precaution and spray the whole field. But with children we act like the bad gardener. We often fail to carry out elementary preventive measures, and we look for the causes in the individual child. A whole high-sounding terminology has been put to use for that purpose, bristling with "deep emotional disorders," "profound psychogenic features" and "hidden motives baffling in their complexity." And children are arbitrarily classified—usually after the event—as "abnormal," "unstable" or "predisposed," words that often fit their environment better than they fit the children. The question is, Can we help the plant without attending to the garden?

A number of years ago an attorney from a large industrial city came to consult me about an unusual problem. A group of prominent businessmen had become interested in a reformatory for boys. This attorney knew of my work in mental hygiene clinics and wanted me to look over this reformatory and advise whether, and how, a mental hygiene department could be set up there. "Very good work is done there," he told me. "It is a model place and the boys are very contented and happy. I would like you to visit the institution and tell us whether you think we need a mental hygiene clinic there."

I spent some time at that reformatory. It was a well laid out place with cottages widely spaced in a beautiful landscape. I looked over the records and charts and then suggested that I wanted to see some individual children, either entirely alone or with just the attorney present. There was considerable difficulty about this. I was told that it would be much better if the director or some of his assistants would show me around and be present during any interviews. Eventually, however, I succeeded in going from cottage to cottage and seeing some

boys alone. I told them frankly who I was and finally asked each child, "Supposing I could give you what you want most, what would you choose?" There was only one answer: "I want to go home."

The children's logic was simple and realistic. The adults said this was not a jail because it was so beautiful. But the children knew that the doors were locked—so it *was* a jail. The lawyer (who heard some of this himself) was crestfallen. He had never spoken to any of the inmates alone before. "What a story!" he said. "They all want to get out!"

I remember contradicting him. The real story is not that they want to get out, I said. The story is how they got in. To send a child to a reformatory is a serious step. But many children's-court judges do it with a light heart and a heavy calendar. To understand a delinquent child one has to know the social soil in which he developed and became delinquent or troubled. And, equally important, one should know the child's inner life history, the way in which his experiences are reflected in his wishes, fantasies and rationalizations. Children like to be at home, even if we think the home is not good. To replace a home one needs more than a landscape gardener and a psychiatrist. In no inmate in that reformatory, as far as I could determine, had there been enough diagnostic study or constructive help *before* the child was deprived of his liberty.

The term *mental hygiene* has been put to such stereotyped use, even though embellished by psychological profundities, that it has become almost a cliché. It is apt to be forgotten that its essential meaning has to do with *prevention*. The concept of juvenile delinquency has fared similarly since the Colorado Juvenile Court law of half a century ago: "The delinquent child shall be treated not as a criminal, but as misdirected and misguided, and needing aid, encouragement, help and assistance." This was a far-reaching and history-making attitude, but the great promise of the juvenile-court laws has not been fulfilled. And the early laws do not even mention the serious

acts which bring children routinely to court nowadays and which juvenile courts now have to contend with. The Colorado law mentions only the delinquent who "habitually wanders around any railroad yards or tracks, or jumps or hooks to any moving train, or enters any car or engine without lawful authority."

Streetcar hoppings, like streetcars themselves, have gone out of fashion. In recent years children's-court judges have been faced with such offenses as assault, murder, rape, torture, forgery, etc. So it has come about that at the very time when it is asked that more youthful offenders be sent to juvenile courts, these courts are ill prepared to deal with the types of delinquency that come before them. Comic books point that out even to children. One of them shows a pretty young girl who has herself picked up by men in cars and then robs them, after threatening them with a gun. She calls herself a "hellcat" and the men "suckers." Finally she shoots and kills a man. When brought before the judge she says defiantly: "You can't pin a murder rap on me! I'm only seventeen! That lets me out in this state!"

To which the judge replies: "True—but I *can* hold you for juvenile delinquency!"

Some time ago a judge found himself confronted with twelve youths, the catch of some hundred and fifty policemen assigned to prevent a street battle of juvenile gangs. This outbreak was a sequel to the killing of a fifteen-year-old boy who had been stabbed to death as he sat with his girl in a parked car. The twelve boys were charged with being involved in the shooting of three boys with a .22-caliber zip gun and a .32 revolver. The indignant judge addressed them angrily, "We're not treating you like kids any longer. . . . If you act like hoodlums you'll be treated like hoodlums." But *were* these youths treated like "kids" in the first place? Were they protected against the corrupting influence of comic books which glamorize and advertise

dangerous knives and the guns that can be converted into deadly weapons?

The public is apt to be swayed by theories according to which juvenile delinquency is treated as an entirely individual emotional problem, to be handled by individualistic means. This is exemplified by the very definition of juvenile delinquency in a recent psychopathological book on the subject: "We have assigned the generic term of delinquency to all these thoughts, actions, desires and strivings which deviate from moral and ethical principles." Such a definition diffuses the concept to such an extent that no concrete meaning remains. This unsocial way of thinking is unscientific and leads to confused theory and inexpedient practice. For example, one writer stated recently that "too much exposure to horror stories and to violence can be a contributing factor to a child's insecurity or fearfulness," but it could not "make a child of any age a delinquent." Can such a rigid line be drawn between the two? As Hal Ellson has shown again recently in his book *Tomboy*, children who commit serious delinquencies often suffer from "insecurity and fearfulness." And children who are insecure and fearful are certainly in danger of committing a delinquent act. Just as there is such a thing as being predelinquent, so there are conditions where a child is pre-insecure, or prefearful. Would it not be better, for purposes of prevention, instead of making an illogical contrast between a social category like delinquency and a psychological category like fearfulness, to think of *children in trouble*—in trouble with society, in trouble with their families or in trouble with themselves? And is it not likely that "too much exposure to horror stories and to violence" is bad for all of them when they get into trouble, and before they get into trouble?

In the beginning of July, 1950, a middle-aged man was sitting near the bleachers at the Polo Grounds watching a baseball game. He had invited the thirteen-year-old son of a friend, who sat with him excited and radiating enthusiasm. Suddenly the

people sitting near by heard a sharp sound. The middle-aged man, scorecard in hand, slumped over and his young friend turned and was startled to see him looking like a typical comic-book illustration. Blood was pouring from his head and ears. He died soon afterwards and was carried away. Spectators rushed to get the vacant seats, not realizing at all what had happened.

In such a spectacular case the police go in for what the headlines like to call a dragnet. This had to be a pretty big one. In the crowded section of the city overlooking the Polo Grounds there were hundreds of apartment buildings in a neighborhood of more than thirty blocks, and from the roof of any of them someone could have fired such a shot. As a matter of fact, at the very beginning of the search detectives confiscated six rifles from different persons. Newspapers and magazines played up the case as the "Mystery Death," the "Ball Park Death" and "The Random Bullet."

Soon the headlines changed to "Hold Negro Youth in Shooting" and the stories told of the "gun-happy fourteen-year-old Negro boy" who was being held by the authorities. Editorials reproached his aunt for being "irresponsible in the care and training of a youngster" and for "being on the delinquent side of the adult ledger."

In the apartment where this boy Willie lived with his great-aunt, and on the roof of the building, the police found "two .22-caliber rifles, a high-powered .22-caliber target pistol, ammunition for all three guns, and a quantity of ammunition for a Luger pistol." This served as sufficient reason to arrest and hold the boy's great-aunt on a Sullivan Law charge (for possession of a gun). She was not released until the boy, who was held in custody all during this time, had signed a confession stating that he had owned and fired a .45-caliber pistol—which, incidentally, was never found. In court the judge stated, "We cannot find you guilty, but I believe you to be guilty." With

this statement he sentenced Willie to an indeterminate sentence in the state reformatory.

For the public the case was closed. The authorities had looked for the cause of this extraordinary event, which might have affected anyone in the crowd, in one little boy and took it out on him, along with a public slap at his aunt. They ignored the fact that other random shooting by juveniles had been going on in this as in other sections of the city. Only a few days after the Polo Grounds shooting, a passenger on a Third Avenue elevated train was wounded by a shot that came through the window. But with Willie under lock and key, the community felt that its conscience was clear.

It happened that I had known Willie for some time before all this. He had been referred to the Lafargue Clinic—a free psychiatric clinic in Harlem—by the Reverend Shelton Hale Bishop as a school problem. He was treated at the Clinic. We had studied his earliest development. We knew when he sat up, when he got his first tooth, when he began to talk and walk, how long he was bottle fed, when he was toilet trained. Psychiatrists and social workers had conferences about him.

Willie had been taken care of by his great-aunt since he was nineteen months old. His parents had separated shortly before. This aunt, an intelligent, warm, hard-working woman, had done all she could to give Willie a good upbringing. She worked long hours at domestic work and with her savings sent him (at the age of two) to a private nursery school, where he stayed until he was eight. Then she became ill, could not work so hard and so could not afford his tuition there. He was transferred to a public school where he did not adjust so well, missing the attention he had received in the private school. At that time his aunt took him to the Lafargue Clinic. He had difficulty with his eyes and had to wear glasses which needed changing. According to his aunt he had occasionally suffered from sleepwalking which started when he was six or seven. Once when his great-aunt waked him up from such a somnambulistic state he said, half-

awake, that he was “going to look for his mother.” He was most affectionate with his aunt, and she had the same affection for him. She helped him to get afternoon jobs at neighborhood grocery stores, delivering packages.

Willie was always a rabid comic-book reader. He “doted” on them. He spent a large part of the money he earned to buy them. Seeing all their pictures of brutality and shooting and their endless glamorous advertisements for guns and knives, his aunt had become alarmed—years before the Polo Grounds shooting—and did not permit him to bring them into the house. She also forbade him to read them. But of course such direct action on the part of a parent has no chance of succeeding in an environment where comic books are all over the place in enormous quantities. She encountered a further obstacle, too. Workers at a public child-guidance agency connected with the schools made her distrust her natural good sense and told her she should let Willie read all the comic books he wanted. She told one of the Lafargue social workers, “I didn’t like for him to read these comic books, but I figured they knew better than I did.”

The Lafargue Clinic has some of his comic books. They are before me as I am writing this, smudgily printed and well thumbed, just as he used to pore over them with his weak eyes. Here is the lecherous-looking bandit overpowering the attractive girl who is dressed (if that is the word) for very hot weather (“She could come in handy, then! Pretty little spitfire, eh!”) in the typical pre-rape position. Later he threatens to kill her:

“Yeah, it’s us, you monkeys, and we got an old friend of yours here. . . . Now unless you want to see somp’n FATAL happen to her, u’re gonna kiss that gold goodbye and lam out of here!”

Here is violence galore, violence in the beginning, in the middle, at the end:

ZIP! CRASH! SOCK! SPLAT! BAM! SMASH!

(This is an actual sequence of six pictures illustrating brutal fighting, until in the seventh picture: "He's out cold!")

Here, too, is the customary close-up of the surprised and frightened-looking policeman with his hands half-raised saying:

NO—NO! DON'T SHOOT!

as he is threatened by a huge fist holding a gun to his face. This is followed by mild disapproval ("You've gone too far! This is murder!") as the uniformed man lies dead on the ground. This comic book is endorsed by child specialists who are connected with important institutions. No wonder Willie's aunt did not trust her own judgment sufficiently.

The stories have a lot of crime and gunplay and, in addition, alluring advertisements of guns, some of them full-page and in bright colors, with four guns of various sizes and descriptions on a page:

Get a sweet-shootin' —— [gun] and get in on the fun!

Here is the repetition of violence and sexiness which no Freud, Krafft-Ebing or Havelock Ellis ever dreamed would be offered to children, and in such profusion. Here is one man mugging another, and graphic pictures of the white man shooting colored natives as though they were animals: "You sure must have treated these beggars rough in that last trip through here!" And so on. This is the sort of thing that Willie's aunt wanted to keep him from reading.

When the Lafargue staff conferred about this case, as we had about so many similar others, we asked ourselves: How does one treat such a boy? How does one help him to emotional balance while emotional excitement is instilled in him in an unceasing stream by these comic books? Can one be satisfied with the explanation that he comes from a broken family and lives in an underprivileged neighborhood? Can one scientifically disregard what occupied this boy's mind for hours every day? Can we say

that this kind of literary and pictorial influence had no effect at all, disregarding our clinical experience in many similar cases? Or can we get anywhere by saying that he must have been disordered in the first place or he would not have been so fascinated by comic books?

That would have meant ignoring the countless other children equally fascinated whom we had seen. Evidently in Willie's case there was a constellation of many factors. Which was finally the operative one? What in the last analysis tipped the scales?

Slowly, and at first reluctantly, I have come to the conclusion that this chronic stimulation, temptation and seduction by comic books, both their content and their alluring advertisements of knives and guns, are contributing factors to many children's maladjustment.

All comic books with their words and expletives in balloons are bad for reading, but not every comic book is bad for children's minds and emotions. The trouble is that the "good" comic books are snowed under by those which glorify violence, crime and sadism.

At no time, up to the present, has a single child ever told me as an excuse for a delinquency or for misbehavior that comic books were to blame. Nor do I nor my associates ever question a child in such a way as to suggest that to him. If I find a child with fever I do not ask him, "What is the cause of your fever? Do you have measles?" I examine him and make my own diagnosis. It is our clinical judgment, in all kinds of behavior disorders and personality difficulties of children, that comic books do play a part. Of course they are not in the textbooks. But once alerted to the possibility, we unexpectedly found, in case after case, that comic books were a contributing factor not to be neglected. I asked psychiatric colleagues, child psychologists and social workers. They knew nothing about comic books. They knew that there were such little books; they may even have had them in their waiting rooms. And they knew about

funny animal stories that children liked to read. Comic books, they assumed, were just reprints of comic strips from newspapers or Sunday supplements—"like 'Bringing Up Father,' you know"—or other such humorous sequences. Why, they felt, should any physician take a serious interest in them?

No one had any idea of the enormous number of such books. The industry had not given out any figures, nor had a magazine or newspaper published any. When I made public the result of my own estimates and computations, namely that there were (then) some sixty million comic books a month, my statement was met with absolute incredulity. Some people thought that it was a misprint, and that sixty million must be a *yearly* figure. But shortly afterwards authoritative magazines and newspapers (such as *Business Week*) repeated my figure as an authentic one.

Nor was I believed at first when I stated that children spend an inordinate amount of time with comic books, many of them two or three hours a day. I asked those working with groups of children, "How can you get the 'total picture' of a child when you leave out entirely what occupies him two or three hours a day?" Again and again it happened that when they made inquiries they told me of finding out to their surprise how many comic books children read, how bad these books are and what an enormous amount of time children spend with them.

Some time after I had become aware of the effects of comic books, a woman visited me. She was a civic leader in the community and invited me to give some lectures on child guidance, education and delinquency. We had a very pleasant conversation. It happened that on that very morning I had been overruled by the Children's Court. I had examined a boy who had threatened a woman teacher with a switchblade knife. Ten years before, that would have been a most unusual case, but now I had seen quite a number of similar ones. This particular boy seemed to me a very good subject for treatment. He was not really a "bad boy," and I do not believe in the philosophy

that children have instinctive aggressive urges to commit such acts. In going over his life, I had asked him about his reading. He was enthusiastic about comic books. I looked over some of those he liked best. They were filled with alluring tales of shooting, knifing, hitting and strangling. He was so intelligent, frank and open that I considered him not an inferior child, but a superior one. I know that many people glibly call such a child maladjusted; but in reality he was a child well adjusted to what we had offered him to adjust to. In other words, I felt this was a seduced child. But the Court decided otherwise. They felt that society had to be protected from this menace. So they sent him to a reformatory.

In outlining to the civic leader what I would talk about, I mentioned comic books. The expression of her face was most disappointed. Here she thought she had come to a real psychiatrist. She liked all the other subjects I had mentioned; but about comic books she knew everything herself.

"I have a daughter of eleven," she said. "She reads comic books. Of course only the animal comics. I have heard that there are some others, but I have never seen them. Of course I would never let them come into my home and she would never read them. As for what you said about crime comics, Doctor, they are only read by adults. Even so, these crime comics probably aren't any worse than what children have read all along. You know, dime novels and all that." She looked at me then with a satisfied look, pleased that there was one subject she could really enlighten me about.

I asked her, "In the group that I am to speak to, do you think some of the children of these women have gotten into trouble with stealing or any other delinquency?"

She bent forward confidentially. "You've guessed it," she said. "That's really why we want these lectures. You'd be astonished at what these children from these good middle-class homes do nowadays. You know, you won't believe it, but they break into apartments, and a group of young boys molested sev-

eral small girls right in our neighborhood! Not to speak of the mugging that goes on after dark.”

“What happens to these boys?” I asked her.

“You know how it is,” she said. “One has to hush these things up as much as possible, but when it got too bad, of course, they were put away.”

There was no doubt that this was an intelligent and well-meaning woman, and yet the unfairness of it all had not occurred to her. Children of eleven do not read only animal comics—whether the parents know it or not. They see all the crime, horror, superman and jungle comics elsewhere if they are not allowed at home. There is a whole machinery to protect adults from seeing anything that is obscene or too rough in the theater, in the movies, in books and even in night clubs. The children are left entirely unprotected. They are shown crime, delinquency and sexual abnormality, but the punishment they get if they succumb to the suggestions is far more severe than what an adult gets if he strays from the path of virtue.

After this conversation, I felt that not only did I have to be a kind of detective to trace some of the roots of the modern mass delinquency, but that I ought to be some kind of defense counsel for the children who were condemned and punished by the very adults who permitted them to be tempted and seduced. As far as children are concerned, the punishment does not fit the crime. I have noticed that a thousand times. Not only is it cruel to take a child away from his family, but what goes on in many reformatories hurts children and does them lasting harm. Cruelty to children is not only what a drunken father does to his son, but what those in high estate, in courts and welfare agencies, do to straying youth.

This civic leader was only one of many who had given me a good idea of what I was up against, but I took courage from the fact that societies for the prevention of cruelty to children were formed many years after societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals.

I began to study the effects of comic-book reading more consistently and systematically. We saw many kinds of children: normal ones; troubled ones; delinquents; those from well-to-do families and from the lowest rung of the economic ladder; children from different parts of the city; children referred by different public and private agencies; the physically well and the physically ill and handicapped; children with normal, subnormal and superior intelligence.

Our research involved not only the examination, treatment and follow-up study of children, but also discussions with parents, relatives, social workers, psychologists, probation officers, writers of children's books, camp counsellors, physicians—especially pediatricians—and clergymen. We made the interesting observation that those nearest to actual work with children regarded comic books as a powerful influence, disapproved of them and considered them harmful. On the other hand, those with the most highly specialized professional training knew little or nothing about comic books and assumed them to be insignificant.

Our study concerned itself with comic *books* and not with newspaper comic *strips*. There are fundamental differences between the two, which the comic-book industry does its best to becloud. Comic strips appear mainly in newspapers and Sunday supplements of newspapers. Comic books are separate entities, always with colored pictures and a glaring cover. They are called "books" by children, "pamphlets" by the printing trade and "magazines" by the Post Office which accords them second class mailing privileges.

Comic books are most widely read by children, comic strips by adults. There is, of course, an overlap, but the distinction is a valid and important one.

Newspaper comic strips function under a severe censorship exercised by some 1,500 newspaper editors of the country who sometimes reject details or even whole sequences of comic strips. For comic books there exists no such censorship by an

outside agency which has the authority to reject. When comic strips are reprinted as comic books, the censorship that existed before, when they were intended for adults, disappears and the publisher enjoys complete license. He can (and sometimes does) add a semipornographic story for the children, for example, and a gory cover—things from which censorship protects the adult comic strip reader.

Some of my psychiatric friends regarded my comics research as a Don Quixotic enterprise. But I gradually learned that the number of comic books is so enormous that the pulp paper industry is vitally interested in their mass production. If anything, I was fighting not windmills, but paper mills. Moreover, a most important part of our research consisted in the reading and analysis of hundreds of comic books. This task was not Quixotic but Herculean—reminiscent, in fact, of the job of trying to clean up the Augean stables.

As our work went on we established the basic ingredients of the most numerous and widely read comic books: violence; sadism and cruelty; the superman philosophy, an offshoot of Nietzsche's superman who said, "When you go to women, don't forget the whip." We also found that what seemed at first a problem in child psychology had much wider implications. Why does our civilization give to the child not its best but its worst, in paper, in language, in art, in ideas? What is the social meaning of these supermen, superwomen, super-lovers, super-boys, supergirls, super-ducks, super-mice, super-magicians, super-safecrackers? How did Nietzsche get into the nursery?

The opposition took various forms. I was called a Billy Sunday. Later that was changed to Savonarola. Millions of comic books in the hands of children had whole pages defending comic books against "one Dr. Wertham." A comic strip sequence syndicated in newspapers was devoted to a story of the famous child psychologist Dr. Fredrick Muttontop who speaks against crime comic books, but on returning to his old home town for a lecture on "Comic books, the menace to American

childhood” is told that when he was a boy he used to read much worse things himself. And the cover of a crime comic book showed a caricature of me as a psychiatrist tied to a chair in his office with mouth tightly closed and sealed with many strips of adhesive tape. This no doubt was wishful thinking on the part of the comic-book publishers.

But as our studies continued, it seemed to us that Virgilia Peterson, author and critic, stated the core of the question when she said: “The most controversial thing about Dr. Wertham’s statements against comic books is the fact that anyone finds them controversial.” There were counterarguments and counteractions. These we took very seriously, read and followed carefully, and as a matter of fact incorporated into the social part of our research into the comic-book problem.

Little did I think when I started it that this study would continue for seven years. A specialist in child psychology referring to my correlation of crime comic books with violent forms of juvenile delinquency wrote disdainfully that no responsibility should be placed on “such trivia as comic books.” I thought that once, too. But the more children I studied, the more comic books I read, and the more I analyzed the arguments of comic-book defenders, the more I learned that what may appear as “trivia” to adults are not trivia in the lives of many children.

II

“You Always Have to Slug 'em”

What Are Crime Comic Books?

*“And children grow up where the shadows fall-
ing
From wall and window have the light exiled,
And know not that without the flowers are call-
ing
Unto a day of distance, wind and wild.”*

—Rainer Maria Rilke

“Every boy has his idol! He may be a star athlete, a two-fisted Hollywood Western actor or a famous general. But some boys veer away from such heroes, and admire the bad men.”

This is the beginning of a comic-book story in which a “hood” teaches two little boys: “If you kids wanna learn to be like me, you gotta be tough! Never give the other guy an even break!”

He shows them a well-dressed young boy. They proceed to threaten this boy and he hands over his money to them. But that does not satisfy the tough teacher. He bangs their heads together and exclaims: “You always have to slug ’em! Remember that!” This is the elementary lesson of crime comics.

Many adults think that they know all about crime comic books because they know mystery and detective novels, comic strips in newspapers and have cast an occasional glance at a comic book at a newsstand or in a child’s hands. But the Lafargue group of researchers has often convinced itself that most adults have really no idea of the details and content of the majority of crime comic books. I have heard public discussions where only the publishers and their representatives knew what was being talked about; the parents, teachers and doctors who asked discussion questions spoke of comic books as if they were fairy tales or stories of folklore. Children, however, do know what comic books are. The whole crime-comic-book trade is designed for them and is dependent on them, even though there are adults, too, who read such comics.

For years we have been testing this in many ways, including interviews with people who sell comic books in big and little newsstands in cities and towns, in big drugstores and little candy stores, in general stores and ice-cream parlors. Our studies included several states and did not overlook the smallest villages in the country. We have found crime comic books shown in display cases side by side with—and mingled with—comic books not featuring crime, intended for the very youngest children. And in many non-crime comic books we have found alluring advertisements drawing the child’s attention to crime

comics. The wording of advertisements for toys in many of the worst crime comics make it apparent that the books carrying these advertisements are intended for children, and some of the most irresponsible crime comic books have approving letters from child readers.

Of course there are people who still fall for the contention of the comic-book industry that their products deal not with crime, but with the punishment of crime. Is not the very title of some of these books, *Crime Does Not Pay?* Here, too, adults are more readily deceived than children. Children know that in quite a number of crime comic books there is in the title some reference to punishment. But they also know that just as that very reference is in small letters and inconspicuous color, the parts of the title that really count are in huge, eye-catching type and clear sharp colors: CRIME; CRIMINALS; MURDER; LAW BREAKERS; GUNS; etc. The result of this is, of course, that when comic books are on display only the *crime* and not the punishment is visible. Often the type of the second part of the title is so arranged that in the display case it does not show at all, concealed as it is behind the tops of other comic books. These are a few examples:

LAWBREAKERS Always Lose
There Is No Escape For PUBLIC ENEMIES
The West Thunders with the Roar of GUNS
CRIME Can't Win
Western OUTLAWS and Sheriffs
CRIMINALS on the Run

The great attraction of crime comic books for children is alleged to be continuous fast action. There may be some. But when the stories come to details of a delinquency or depiction of brutality, the action slows noticeably. A typical example, vintage autumn, 1950: In one story there are thirty-seven pictures, of which twelve (that is, one in three) show brutal near-rape scenes. The story begins like this:

“Late one night, in the suburbs of a large city, the moon looks down on the figure of a lone girl as she walks along a block of slumbering homes. . . . Anything can happen at this hour!”

Forthwith it does. For example:

- 1) The girl walking along with a dark figure, his arm stretched out toward her, lurking behind.
- 2) The girl falling over, her breast prominent, her skirt thrown up to reveal black net panties, the “attacker” a black, shadowed figure leaning over her.
- 3) He “drags her into the gloom;” holding his hand over her mouth and tearing off her coat.
- 4) He has her on the ground behind some bushes.
- 5) A girl, murdered, and presumably raped, is shown on the ground with her clothes disordered and torn.
- 6) Another girl being choked from behind. Screams: “AI-EEEK!!”
- 7) “The Strangler” locks her in a warehouse, saying: “I’ll kill you just like I did the others—Then I’ll crawl down the trap door and get away under the dock—HA! HA!”

When Mr. E. D. Fulton, member of the Canadian House of Commons, introduced his anti-crime-comic-book bill before that House, he characterized them as “the kind of magazine, forty or fifty pages of which portray nothing but scenes illustrating the commission of crimes of violence with every kind of horror that the mind of man can conceive.”

In our clinical research on crime comic books we came to the conclusion that *crime comic books are comic books that depict crime*, whether the setting is urban, Western, science-fiction, jungle, adventure or the realm of supermen, “horror” or supernatural beings. We found that to study the effect of comic books on children it is necessary to study the comic books themselves, too. To read them like an adult is not enough. One must read them in the light of how children read them. The comic book as

a whole has a number of features which children single out habitually and which reinforce one another.

First of all there is the cover. It is always printed on much better paper than the rest of the book, and of course has much larger print and the colors stand out more glaringly and forcefully. The title also counts for a lot. The scene depicted on the cover is usually violent. It is intended to catch the child's attention and whet his appetite.

For example, in a comic-book reprint of a newspaper comic strip—the cover shows a scene which does not occur at all in the strip. In transforming this comic strip, intended chiefly for adults, to a comic book for children, this scene is added: A young woman with prominent breasts and nude legs is lying on a cot. Her lips are rouged, her hair falls loosely in masses over her bare shoulders and her face has a coquettish expression. This is supposed to be the scene of a surgical operation! There are two white-gowned and white-capped men beside her, one about to put a chloroform mask over her face, the other holding scissors in his right hand and in his left a knife whose sharp blade is surrounded with a yellow zigzag halo (used in comic books as a rule to designate the effects of cutting or shooting). The whole scene has nothing to do with medicine and is unmistakably sadistic.

The covers often have little encircled messages. Conspicuous ones may indicate that the stories are based on true police cases or F.B.I. files. Inconspicuous ones may bear heartwarming words to the effect that the law will prevail eventually. Other messages on the cover are like seals. They may indicate that the comic book conforms or professes to conform to some special code, or very similar signs may indicate just the firm or the publisher.

A typical sample has inconspicuously above its crime title, "A force for good in the community!" and underneath that in a small circle, "Crime does not pay," and then in a square, "TRUE criminal case histories!" and, in smaller type, hard to

read, the words "Dedicated to the eradication of crime!" Average, normal boys have often told me that if they read such signs at all they know of course that they are only "eyewash" intended to influence parents and teachers who have no time to read the whole comic book.

The cover of this sample depicts a corpse with blood on his mouth, with the killer who has just beaten him to death beside him.

Another important feature of a crime comic book is the first page of the first story, which often gives the child the clue to the thrill of violence that is to be its chief attraction. This is a psychological fact that all sorts of children have pointed out to me. *Macbeth* in comic book form is an example. On the first page the statement is made: "Amazing as the tale may seem, the author gathered it from true accounts"—the typical crime comic book formula, of course. The first balloon has the words spoken by a young woman (Lady Macbeth): "Smear the sleeping servants with BLOOD!"

To the child who looks at the first page "to see what's in it," this gives the strongest suggestion. And it gives the whole comic book the appeal of a crime comic book. As for the content of this *Macbeth*, John Mason Brown, the well-known critic, expressed it in the *Saturday Review of Literature*: "To rob a supreme dramatist of the form at which he excelled is mayhem plus murder in the first degree . . . although the tale is murderous and gory, it never rises beyond cheap horror. . . . What is left is not a tragedy. It is trashcan stuff." It is interesting that what adult critics deduce from the whole book, children sense from the first balloon. They know a crime comic when they see one, whatever the disguise.

The educational page, skipped by many children, pointed to with pride by the publishers and approved (but not sufficiently scrutinized) by parents and teachers, could conceivably contain a counterstimulant to the violence of the stories, but often it just gives some historical rationalization of it. For instance, in

a jungle comic book what does the educational page show? This one is entitled "The First Americans." A young girl in modern evening dress, her wrists chained to a tall upholstered structure so that she leans backward in a recumbent position revealing the full length of her legs, with a definite erotic suggestion, is being menaced with a big knife held by a gruesome masked figure: "At harvest and planting time they would cut out the heart of a living victim." In other words, the education to sadism permeating this whole book is here fortified in the guise of history.

Other features in the structure of a crime comic book are the first page of or before each individual story, the content of the stories, the type of language used, recurring details of plot or drawing as opposed to the professed ideology, the advertisements and the endorsements in the form of names of endorsers and the prominent institutions with which they are connected.

Endorsements came into fashion after Sterling North, the literary critic, early in the forties, published a number of critical articles based on his reading of comic books. As one boy told me when I asked him what these endorsements by psychiatrists and educators meant to him, "Oh, the more endorsements they need, the more they have." The claim that crime comic books might instill in any adolescent or pre-adolescent of average intelligence the idea or sentiment that prevention of crime or of antisocial activity is their goal, is so farfetched that mere reading of the comic books in question will answer it.

Take a comic book with a characteristic crime title, a lurid cover with a picture of one gangster about to be murdered by some other gangsters, and an inconspicuous circle with a purple passage of ethical make-believe: "This magazine is dedicated to the prevention of crime. We hope that within its pages the youth of America will learn to know crime for what it really is: a sad, black, dead end road of fools and tears." Compare with this sentiment some of the highlights inside this cover:

- 1) A criminal terrorizes a family on a farm, makes advances to the farmer's young wife and beats the farmer when he objects.
- 2) He takes the little boy into the woods as a hostage.
- 3) The little boy, after a while, says: "I can't go any faster an' I don't care! You're gonna kill me anyhow!"—to which the criminal replies: "Ya wise little rat! I'll kill ya! But before I do I'll knock yer teeth out!"
- 4) The little boy, as he is being beaten, "OH-H-H-H-H-H-H . . ."
- 5) In the end, the criminal, who of course commits many other crimes in the course of the story, is not punished by the law, but like a hero refuses to give himself up, and shoots himself.

This story has ninety-seven pictures where the criminal is winning and one for the apotheosis of his suicide. Of course there is a gun advertisement, too. If the child who read the purple passage on the cover—if he did read it—reads the book this far, he knows that this passage has nothing whatsoever to do with the contents of the comic book.

As far as literate adults were concerned, this type of children's literature got into mass circulation unnoticed. A best seller for adults which is distributed in 10,000 copies or so is discussed in learned book reviews for its art, its technique, its plot, its social significance. A crime comic book is printed in from 250,000 to 500,000 or more copies, and most copies are read by several children, and exchanged, sold, retraded. However, these books are not reviewed or taken notice of.

It has been said by experts of the industry that children have to learn about the life around them, and that for this comic books are a big help. Do children really have to learn this sort of thing, and in this way? Here is a comic book whose cover bears the slogan: "Every word true!" Inside is an orgy of brutality, crime, "dope selling," men tortured, girls with half-

bared bosoms, pictures of men stabbed in the stomach, shot, their arms twisted and, of course, an advertisement with a half-page picture of a gun.

Many adults think that the crimes described in comic books are so far removed from the child's life that for children they are merely something imaginative or fantastic. But we have found this to be a great error. Comic books and life are connected. A bank robbery is easily translated into the rifling of a candy store. Delinquencies formerly restricted to adults are increasingly committed by young people and children.

The comic-book stories about drug addiction are an instructive angle. The lead story of one crime comic, for instance, deals with narcotics. It is clear from the wording of the advertisements that the book is intended for children: "Dad and Mom will want it too." Traffic in narcotics is described and the high profits alluringly pointed out. Another crime comic describes the wonderful effects of morphine: "One needleful of joy-juice and you get so satisfied with the world you forget your obligations!"

When I criticized these morphine and heroin comics stories for children I came up against the objection that in reality children have nothing to do with drug addiction, so this meant nothing to them. That was several years before newspapers and news magazines had headlines like "New York Wakes Up to Find 1500 Teen-Age Dope Addicts."

We had known about childhood drug addiction for some time. It was one of the Lafargue child-guidance counsellors who brought the first child drug addict to official attention. This boy of fourteen had come and asked for help.

"I am a mainliner," he said. "I want to get rid of the habit. I have been popping myself. I have been hitting the mainline."

He rolled up his sleeves and showed the sores on his arm. He had a needle with a plain eyedropper attached with which he had given himself injections. A regular hypodermic needle was

too expensive for him. He had been stealing to buy the narcotics.

The facts are that there are heroin addicts who are only twelve years old, that peddlers have been giving school children free samples, that fourteen-year-old boys have been selling heroin on the street, that eight-year-old children have been used by adults as messengers in the drug racket, that a seventeen-year-old girl earned \$1,000 a week through the sale of narcotics, and that many children under thirteen have been introduced to heroin. It was found that in certain sections almost two thirds of the high school seniors had been offered narcotics.

All child drug addicts, and all children drawn into the narcotics traffic as messengers, with whom we have had contact, were inveterate comic-book readers. In the lives of some of these children who are overwhelmed by temptation the pattern is one of stealing, gangs, addiction, comic books and violence. The parallel with crime comic stories is striking. When one knows the social milieu of some of these children one realizes that the spirit that permits crime comic books to exist and flourish is what permits the possibility of childhood drug addiction. And whatever factors come into play in the cases that we have studied, the conclusion is inescapable that crime comics do their part in the education of these children, in softening them up for the temptation of taking drugs and letting themselves be drawn into participation in the illegal drug traffic.

In the light of these facts it is indicative of the general misconception about crime comics, and a matter of regret, that a public agency like New York City's Youth Board lends its name to a "public service page" in crime comic books. This page, supposed to fight drug addiction among juveniles, shows the progress of a boy addict and bears the legend: "The Comics Magazine Industry pledges itself to aid youngsters in their fight against the enemies of youth—the dope peddlers." Are the children supposed to fight the adult drug-racketeers? That should be the concern of the adults. This page is in reality just an ad-

vertisement for "The Comics Magazine Industry" and is highly misleading to parents and children alike. A typical comic book with this page is one of the worst crime comics. Is this the proper setting for honest or effective advice to youth?

When adolescent drug addiction had finally come to public attention, it led to the publication of lurid new comic books devoted entirely to the subject, like the one with the title, *Teen-age Dope Slaves*. This is nothing but another variety of crime comic of a particularly deplorable character.

A further adornment of crime comics may be a seal on the cover indicating that the book is "Authorized A.C.M.P." (Association of Comics Magazine Publishers) and "Conforms to the comics code." This association, which is not listed in the telephone book, was formed following one of my most outspoken statements about what parents don't know about comic books. A representative sample of a comic book bearing this endorsement shows the customary unrelieved succession of crimes and violence. And among the weapons advertised in this comic book are guns, knives and whips—with thirty-seven illustrations of guns altogether, one of them a high-powered air pistol at \$19.95. A District Attorney in New York City has definitely linked such arsenal advertisements to the actual arsenals confiscated from juveniles by the police.

Two stories are characterized on their first pages as "true F.B.I. cases," two as "true police cases." In one story, the first, out of fifty-one pictures no less than forty-five are scenes of violence and brutality. This, according to the seal on the cover, is an authorized percentage conforming to the comics code. I wonder how high the percentage must run before a comic book is considered as not conforming to the code? In no book for adults, including detective and mystery stories, in no movie, is such a proportion even approached.

The comic book I have just mentioned belonged to the early period of the much-publicized comics code. One might expect that at that time the Association of Comics Magazine Publishers

would have wanted to do it particularly right, to show that the seal had a meaning. On the other hand, they may not have been able to mend their ways so quickly, and the improvement might come about gradually.

So we carefully followed developments. In a crime comic that came out after the code had been in existence for some time, a representative specimen of this group shows: killing; a policeman knocked out with the usual smart contemptuous wisecrack: "I can't stick around to explain, copper!"; a man shot in the stomach; a woman mugged and then killed with a hammer to get her pocketbook; blood; the up-to-date ending of one murder story: "Archer Frize didn't die in the electric chair! The state psychiatrists found him to be insane!"; detailed instructions about how to hold up a big grocery store; and a brutal murder story with the murderer not caught by the law, but dying by accident. (In the story murder is called a "mistake": "I knew it! They all make mistakes!")

The difficulty in arriving at accurate figures about comic books is considerable. One must distinguish between comic books printed, published, sold and, of course, read. The last item, the pass-on circulation, is most important, for many comic books after having been sold once for ten cents are not only traded for others, but are also sold repeatedly at lower prices: eight cents, six cents, two cents and even one cent. Even in such sales large sums are involved because the total numbers are so staggering. There are clandestine and half-clandestine stores, and backrooms of stores, about which adults know very little, which do business in these cut-rate transactions. On the whole crime comic books are monthly publications rather than bi-monthly like some of the harmless ones like *Super Duck* or *Terrytoon Comics*. They tend to have the largest editions and they are the ones most widely traded.

Owing to the conditioning of children by the industry, crime comic books are more widely read than harmless comics. As the editor of one publishing house stated, "The sports line of

comic books is the cleanest type of comic book in America. We are going to drop it." (It was not "lucrative.")

One crime comic book announces on its cover that it is read by six million readers. It is interesting that this is one of the worst comic books, a veritable primer for teaching Junior juvenile delinquency. The Minister of Justice of the Dominion of Canada called this particular book "a shocking instance of abuse of freedom of the press."

At the time when the industry began to promulgate new codes—the first general one announced after my first public criticism of crime comics—the number of crime comic books began to increase tremendously, both absolutely and in relation to non-crime comics. From 1937 to 1947 only nineteen crime comic titles existed, sixteen of them obvious crime comics, three of them so-called Western comic books that actually featured crimes. But during 1948, 107 new titles of crime comic books appeared, 53 straight crime comics, 54 "Westerns" featuring crime.

It seems that the comic-book industry was in considerable conflict. On the one hand, they were not anxious for the public to know that the comic-book business and its influence was so enormous—though one publisher said in a revealing public statement, "When you get that big you just can't escape public attention!" On the other hand, since a sizable amount of advertising is carried in comic books, they like to use figures as large as possible. So while one could still find figures lower than my estimates, one could also find figures as high as 75 million a month (*Advertising Age*) or 80 million a month (Association of Comics Magazine Publishers).

The number of comic-book titles is a particularly elusive figure. As *Advertising Age* put it, "Statistics in the comic book field are somewhat misleading. A certain amount of duplication and consequent distortion . . ." are present. A number of times when I cited a specific comic book it disappeared—to reappear promptly under a different name. Other titles just dis-

appear, and new ones crop up constantly. So do names of "new" publishing firms. That is why I have called crime comic books "hit and run publications." Often the public does not even know which firm publishes which crime comic, because the names of the firms publishing crime comic books are almost as elusive as the titles. They change, and quite a number of concerns function under different names for different comic books. To count the number of crime-comic titles at any given moment is therefore just as futile as to publish the names of objectionable comic books.

Crime comic books represented about one tenth of the total of all comic books in 1946-1947. In 1948-1949 they increased to one third of the total. By 1949 comic books featuring crime, violence and sadism made up over one half of the industry. By 1954 they form the vast majority of all comic books.

The problem of the effect of crime comic books is like a combined clinical and laboratory problem in infectious diseases. You not only have to study the possibly affected individuals; you have to investigate the potentially injurious agents themselves, their varieties, their lives, their habitat. There is a considerable distance from the pure culture of the bacillus to the clinical case.

What about the "wholesome" adventure stories, the "Westerns," for example? The vast majority, if not all Western comic books are crime comic books. They describe all kinds of crime and brutality. For example, one marked on the cover as "Your Favorite Western Star" has an "arsenal advertisement" on the inside cover with the endorsement of —— M.D., psychiatrist, on the page facing it. On the back cover is a full-page gun advertisement with a gun pictured across the whole page. This book is especially badly printed, and shows, among other things, the close-up of a dying man with blood streaming from his mouth.

In another Western, one man has gold dust thrown in his eyes

(an example of what I call the injury-to-the-eye motif, this being a very frequent feature in comic books).

Another comic book expresses the whole philosophy: "Since when do we worry about killin' people?"

Between its gory pages is a whole page devoted to an attack on "A Dr. Wertham [who] discussed the problem of juvenile delinquency in America today and pinned the blame for some of these cases on comic magazines." This page ends by drawing attention to "Dr. ———'s [a psychiatrist] endorsement on the first page of every one of our magazines."

Jungle, horror and interplanetary comics are also crime comics of a special kind. Jungle comics specialize in torture, bloodshed and lust in an exotic setting. Daggers, claws, guns, wild animals, well- or over-developed girls in brassieres and as little else as possible, dark "natives," fires, stakes, posts, chains, ropes, big-chested and heavily muscled Nordic he-men dominate the stage. They contain such details as one girl squirting fiery "radium dust" on the protruding breasts of another girl ("I think I've discovered your Achilles' heel, chum!"); white men banging natives around; a close-up view of the branded breast of a girl; a girl about to be blinded.

Whenever I see a book like this in the hands of a little seven-year-old boy, his eyes glued to the printed page, I feel like a fool to have to prove that this kind of thing is not good mental nourishment for children! What is wrong with the prevailing ethics of educators and psychologists that they have silently permitted this kind of thing year after year, and that after I had drawn attention to it some of them still continued to defend it as helping children to learn about life and "get rid of their pent-up aggressions"? However obvious it might seem, when I saw children getting into trouble and getting sent wholesale to reformatories, I felt that I had to go on with this tedious work.

While the white people in jungle books are blonde and athletic and shapely, the idea conveyed about the natives is that

there are fleeting transitions between apes and humans. I have repeatedly found in my studies that this characterization of colored peoples as subhuman, in conjunction with depiction of forceful heroes as blond Nordic supermen, has made a deep—and I believe lasting—impression on young children. And amidst all the violence between slaves, apes and humans in these books are big pictures of lush girls, as nude as the Post Office permits. Even on an adult, the impression of sex plus violence is definite.

Quite apart from its sadistic groove, the imagination expressed in comic books is mechanical rather than in any way creative. For instance, in a jungle book with the subtitle “The Jungle Girl,” the “Satanic Dr. Zanzere . . . transplants a pair of bat’s wings on to a tiger.” The rest of this book is the usual parade of invitation to sadistic perversion, race hatred and violence for violence’s sake.

What about the “emotional release” a child is supposed to get according to the defenders of the comic-book industry? One story concludes with a close-up of a fist holding a gun and these words:

“A gentle squeeze of the trigger and the last breath of life will be squeezed out of Nyoka! Read on for Part Three of ‘The Treasure of the Tiger’s Paw.’”

In the jungle books the jungle is not really a place but a state of mind. It is easily transposed into outer space in the interplanetary and science-fiction books. The girls are similarly dressed and similarly treated. Torture is more refined. If someone is to be blinded it is done with some extra-scientific instrument:

“Now, ye Maid of Auro, reveal where the thorium has been hidden or my electric prong will burn the eyes from your pretty head.”

The supermen are either half-undressed like their jungle brothers or dressed in fancy raiment that is a mixture of the costumes of S.S. men, divers and robots.

In one comic book of this group old-fashioned mugging—in recent years so frequently practiced by juveniles in large cities—is a recurrent theme, despite the interplanetary trappings. Blood flows freely, bosoms are half-bared, girls' buttocks are drawn with careful attention.

The Superman group of comic books is superendorsed. A random sample shows on the inside cover the endorsement of two psychiatrists, one educator, one English professor and a child-study consultant. On the page facing this array is depicted a man dressed as a boy shooting a policeman in the mouth (with a toy pistol). This is a prank—"Prankster's second childhood." In the story there is a variant of the comic-book theme of a girl being thrown into the fire: "Her dress will be afire in one split second! She'll need Superman's help!"

In another story a tenement building is set afire—also to be taken care of by Superman after it is afire. Until near the end of the book, attempts to kill people are not looked upon askance, and are not to be prevented apparently by humans but only by a superman. Then the lesson that after all you should not kill is expressed like this: "You conniving unscrupulous cad! Try to murder Carol, will you!" This is scarcely a moral condemnation. The lawyer who does not share in a million-dollar swindle is praised by Superman because he "remained honest." In fact this honesty is rewarded with a million dollars! A gun advertisement with four pictures of guns completes the impression that even if you can't become Superman, at least you can rise above the average by using force.

This Superman-Batman-Wonder Woman group is a special form of crime comics. The gun advertisements are elaborate and realistic. In one story a foreign-looking scientist starts a green-shirt movement. Several boys told me that they thought he looked like Einstein. No person and no democratic agency can stop him. It requires the female superman, Wonder Woman. One picture shows the scientist addressing a public meeting:

“So, my fellow Americans, it is time to give America back to Americans! Don’t let foreigners take your jobs!”

Member of the audience: “He’s right!”

Another, applauding: “YEAHHHH!”

The Superman type of comic books tends to force and super-force. Dr. Paul A. Witty, professor of education at Northwestern University, has well described these comics when he said that they “present our world in a kind of Fascist setting of violence and hate and destruction. I think it is bad for children,” he goes on, “to get that kind of recurring diet . . . [they] place too much emphasis on a Fascist society. Therefore the democratic ideals that we should seek are likely to be overlooked.”

Actually, Superman (with the big S on his uniform—we should, I suppose, be thankful that it is not an S.S.) needs an endless stream of ever new submen, criminals and “foreign-looking” people not only to justify his existence but even to make it possible. It is this feature that engenders in children either one or the other of two attitudes: either they fantasy themselves as supermen, with the attendant prejudices against the submen, or it makes them submissive and receptive to the blandishments of strong men who will solve all their social problems for them—by force.

Superman not only defies the laws of gravity, which his great strength makes conceivable; in addition he gives children a completely wrong idea of other basic physical laws. Not even Superman, for example, should be able to lift up a building while not standing on the ground, or to stop an airplane in mid-air while flying himself.

Superwoman (Wonder Woman) is always a horror type. She is physically very powerful, tortures men, has her own female following, is the cruel, “phallic” woman. While she is a frightening figure for boys, she is an undesirable ideal for girls, being the exact opposite of what girls are supposed to want to be.

We have asked many children how they subdivide comic books. A thirteen-year-old boy, in a letter to a national maga-

zine commenting on one of Sterling North's excellent articles on the subject, named five groups of harmful comics: "Fantasy comics, crime comics, superman or superwoman comics, jungle comics (the worst, in my opinion) and comics which still pretend to be funny but throw in a lot of nudity to help them sell."

Many children have a simpler classification. They distinguish between "jokey" books and "interesting books." The latter they also call "exciting books" or "danger books." Very young children who supposedly read only harmless animal comic books often see others in the hands of their older siblings or in other places.

One Lafargue researcher asked a little six-year-old girl what comic books she liked and was told "corpsies." This baffled the researcher (that name would fit so many!). It finally developed when she produced the book that she meant "kewpies." It was one of the very few artistic comic books and had on its inside back cover a charming "Map of Kewpieville" showing Kewpie Square, Willow Wood, Mischief Grounds, Welcome Bridge, a Goblin Glen, Forsaken Lake, Blue Lake and a Snifflebrook. What was impressed on this child's mind, however, were the "corpsies" she had seen in the crime comic books of her friends.

Of course there are also super-animal magazines, like Super Duck. In one of them the duck yells: "No! I kill the parents [of the rabbits]. I am a hard guy and my heart is made of stone!" The scene shows a rabbit crying and begging for mercy, the duck poised to kill him with a baseball bat.

Just as there are wonder women there are wonder animals, like Wonder Ducks. In one such book there is a full-page advertisement for guns, "throwing knives" and whips, and a two-page advertisement for "Official Marine Corps knives, used by the most rugged branch of the armed forces, leathernecks swear by them."

There are also super-children, like Superboy. Superboy can slice a tree like a cake, can melt glass by looking at it ("with his amazing X-ray eyes, Superboy proves the scientific law that

focussed concentrated X-rays can melt glass!"), defeats "a certain gang chief and his hirelings." Superboy rewrites American history, too. In one story he helps George Washington's campaign and saves his life by hitting a Hessian with a snowball. George Washington reports to the Continental Congress: "And sirs, this remarkable boy, a Superboy, helped our boys win a great victory."

One third of a page of this book is a picture of Washington crossing the Delaware—with Superboy guiding the boat through the ice floes. It is really Superboy who is crossing the Delaware, with George Washington in the boat. All this travesty is endorsed by the impressive board of experts in psychiatry, education and English literature.

Comic books adapted from classical literature are reportedly used in 25,000 schools in the United States. If this is true, then I have never heard a more serious indictment of American education, for they emasculate the classics, condense them (leaving out everything that makes the book great), are just as badly printed and inartistically drawn as other comic books and, as I have often found, do *not* reveal to children the world of good literature which has at all times been the mainstay of liberal and humanistic education. They conceal it. The folklorist, G. Legman, writes of comic books based on classics, "After being processed in this way, no classic, no matter who wrote it, is in any way distinguishable from the floppity-rabbit and crime comics it is supposed to replace."

A writer of children's books, Eleanor Estes, has said of these comics (in the *Wilson Library Bulletin*), "I think that worse than the comic books that stick to their own fields are the ones that try to rehash the classics. They really are pernicious, for it seems to me that they ruin for a child the fine books which they are trying to popularize."

David Dempsey, writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, has said of the comic book *Julius Caesar* that it has "a Brutus that looks astonishingly like Superman. 'Our course will

seem too bloody to cut the head off and then hack the limbs . . . ' says Brutus, in language that sounds like Captain Marvel. . . " and he notes that "Julius Caesar is followed by a story called 'Tippy, the Terrier.' "

An adaptation from one of Mark Twain's novels has the picture of two small boys in a fight, one tearing the other's hair—a scene not the keynote of Mark Twain's novel. Inside, three consecutive pictures show a fight between two boys ("In an instant both boys were gripped together like cats") and the last picture shows one boy with a finger almost in the other's eye (the injury-to-the-eye motif again).

At the end of 1948 the 60-million-comic-books-a-month were split up between over four hundred comic-book titles of assorted types. All through 1948 the trend of the industry was toward crime comics. Experts of the industry were busy explaining to credulous parents that the industry was only giving to children what they needed and wanted, that scenes of crime and sadism were necessary for them, even good for them, and that the industry was only supplying a demand. But in the meantime my advice to parents had begun to take at least some hold. They had begun to look into crime comic books, and different groups and local authorities started to contemplate, announce, attempt—and even to take—steps.

In direct response to all this the industry executed a brilliant and successful maneuver. Leaving their psychiatric and child experts with their explanations and justifications, they struck out on their own. The experts had said that what the children need is aggression, not affection—crime, not love. But suddenly the industry converted from blood to kisses. They tooled up the industry for a kind of comic book that hardly existed before, the love-confession type. They began to turn them out quickly and plentifully before their own experts had time to retool for the new production line and write scientific papers proving that what children really needed and wanted—what their psychological development really called for—was after all not murder,

but love! In this new genre, shooting a girl in the stomach was out, though previously it had been so necessary.

There had of course been teen-age comics before. But they were mostly not about love or kissing, but in large part about humiliations, a disguised kind of psychological sadism. The confession type, on the other hand, implies a love relationship. There are misunderstandings, jealousies and triangle troubles. The girl is either too shy or too sociable, the boy friend is either the wrong one altogether or he says the wrong things. In many of them, in complete contrast to the previous teen-age group, sexual relations are assumed to have taken place in the background. Just as the crime-comics formula requires a violent ending, so the love-comics formula demands that the story end with reconciliation.

If we were to take seriously the experts of the comic-book industry, the psychology of American children completely reversed itself in 1949. In order to provide for the "deep psychological needs" of children, the industry had been supplying more and more comic books about violence and crime. Now suddenly it began producing dozens of new titles of *love* comics, to satisfy children's new needs. *Murder, Inc.* became *My Private Life*; *Western Killers* became *My True Love*. With the new and profitable policy of the industry, the needs of children had changed overnight. All this would be funny if the happiness and mental development of children were not involved.

Just as some crime comics are especially marked on the cover "For Adults Only" (which of course entices children even more), so some of the love-confession comics are marked "Not Intended For Children." And just as there were supermen, superwomen, superboys and super-ducks, so the industry now supplied a "super-lover." Studying these love-confession books is even more tedious than studying the usual crime comic books. You have to wade through all the mushiness, the false sentiments, the social hypocrisy, the titillation, the cheapness.

Every investigation has its dark moments. One day I received a letter from a highly intelligent and socially active woman who had taken great interest in the curbing of crime comics. She wrote me that in her opinion the love and confession comics may be in bad taste, but at least they do no harm to children although they "give a false picture of love and life." This letter gave me the first doubt that I could ever achieve any practical results from my time-consuming investigation. What more harm *can* be done a child than to give him "a false picture of love and life"?

It is a mistake to think that love comics are read only by adolescent and older children. They are read by very young children as well. An eight-year-old girl living in a very comfortable environment on Long Island said, "I have lots of friends and we buy about one comic book a week and then we exchange. I can read about ten a day. I like to read the comic books about love because when I go to sleep at night I love to dream about love."

Another confession comic book is the reincarnation of a previous teen-age book with an innocuous title. That one was, despite its title, one of the most sexy, specializing in highly accentuated and protruding breasts in practically every illustration. Adolescent boys call these "headlight comics." This is a very successful way to stimulate a boy sexually. In other comic books, other secondary sexual characteristics of women, for example the hips, are played up in the drawing.

The confession comic into which this one turned has a totally different style, the new love-comics formula. One story, "I Was a Spoiled Brat," begins with a big picture of an attractive girl looking at herself in the mirror and baring herself considerably. The dash of violence here is supplied by a hit-and-run driving accident and by the father's dying of a heart attack when he hears about his daughter's life. It all comes out right in the last picture: "But I did live down my past. Tommy is now a leading merchant in Grenville."

Flooding the market with love-confession comics was so successful in diverting attention from crime comic books that it has been entirely overlooked that many of them really *are* crime comic books, with a seasoning of love added. Unless the love comics are sprinkled with some crime they do not sell. Apparently love does not pay.

In one love comic a demonstration is given of how to steal a "very expensive gown, Paris original" from a department store:

"I'll slip it on in the dressing-room. They won't notice me! I'll put it in that box and walk out, while the saleslady is busy with someone else! . . . I walked out, trying to keep calm, trying to look and act natural . . . Nobody has seen me! Oh! If I can only reach the door!"

The youthful reader can also acquire the technique of how to seduce a girl. First you get her boy friend away on a fictitious errand, "knowing it would keep him for most of the night." After a dance you invite the girl for "a little bite" at "a road-house just over the state line": "Here we are, Gale! A nice little private booth! Like it?"

The girl: "Yes—I wouldn't for the world let Nicky think I wasn't sophisticated enough to appreciate it!"

Then you make love to her.

"Nicky! Let me go! All these people!"

Nicky: "You're right, honey! What do we want all these people for? Let's go upstairs to the terrace!"

"Upstairs was a long, narrow hall with five or six doors! Nicky opened the nearest one and I found myself in a small, shoddy-looking room!"

Nicky: "I think we'll be much more comfortable in here, don't you, honey?"

Heroine: "Nicky! I want to go home! Please let me go!"

Nicky: "Home was never like this, baby! Come on, give papa a kiss!"

A nice friendly girl of twelve was brought to me by her mother because she had stolen some money from a lodger. "She

has a mind of her own," the mother said to me. "It goes and comes. The teacher complains that she can't get any work out of her at times." Careful study of the girl over a period of time showed little that was wrong. A social worker asked the mother how the girl spent her time after school. "Reading love comics," the mother replied. "I have nothing against comic books, but she reads them all the time."

This girl I found to be an expert on love comics. She told me she bought some, "but mostly I trade them." I asked her about stealing in love comics. She laughed, "Oh, they do it often. A boy stole a bracelet from a girl he loves very much. He got caught but she still loved him. He spent a term in jail. When he got out he did it again and got sent up to jail again. The girl went to jail to see him, but she fell in love with another boy and got married." This girl was full of such plots. It was hard to determine whether she had daydreamed more of loving or of stealing.

In the *Daily Colonist* (Victoria, B.C.) Arnie Myers reports on an interesting study of love comics like *Intimate Love*, *My Desire*, *My Love Life*, *Love Scandals*, *Lovelorn* and dozens of other similar titles. They are read mostly by "adolescent and pre-adolescent girls." The heroine invariably falls in love at first sight "probably because of space limitations. . . . The books contain crime aplenty—murder, suicide, abduction, arson, robbery, theft and various types of mayhem—but crime is always subordinated to love. . . . The heroines indulge in vast amounts of waywardness, infidelity, cheating, lying and assorted kinds of trickery." One national Parent-Teacher-Association publication termed them "unsuitable for any age." Some newsdealers considered them "as bad as, or worse than, crime comics." One reported "a sale of thirty love comics to a sailor in his mid-twenties." Whatever the mentality of this lonely sailor may have been, is this how we want to bring up eleven- or twelve-year-old girls nowadays?

During the time when the trend toward love-confession com-

ics seemed to be in the ascendancy, those crime comics which continued without changing their policy were read more than ever. Toward the latter part of 1950 a reversal started. Having betrayed their experts by suddenly proclaiming that psychological need and popular demand was not for murder but for love and confession, the industry reversed itself again and set sail for sadism on the old and much-publicized theory that this is what children really need to get rid of their aggressions.

New crime comic books sprang up. Where formerly *Murder, Inc.* had become *My Private Life*, and *Western Killers* had changed to *My True Love*, it was now the other way around; *My Love Memoirs* became *Hunted*, *All Romances* became *Mr. Risk*, and *My Intimate Affair* became *Inside Crime*. Thus does an alert industry follow the abrupt changes in the psychology of American children. Or is it perhaps the other way around?

In one sample of this new psychotherapeutic aggression-removal, there are seventy-three scenes of violence, corpses, wounded, murders and assault. In another a policeman who asks a criminal for his driving license is shot outright. Recently I was asked to help in the defense of a youth who had committed exactly this crime in Connecticut.

Many children read all varieties of crime comics and even poor children get hold of them in astonishingly large numbers. A thirteen-year-old girl, in trouble for habitual truancy, said, "I like jungle books. But I read the others, too. My sister buys romance books, *Diary of Real Life*, *True Romance*, *Sheena*, *Jo-Jo*, *Jungle Jim*—they are exciting! I like to see the way they jump up and kick men down and kill them! I like *Penalty*, *Crime Does Not Pay*. I don't like them because the crook gets caught. I'd like him to get away with it. They show how you steal. A woman walked in a store and took a dress and walked right out and a woman caught her. I like to see women catch them. Sheena got a big jungle she lives in and people down there likes her and would do anything for her. When I get ready to go to bed I read them—about four comic books. We don't all

the time have enough to eat, because my mother hasn't got enough money to buy any."

In this case I saw a previous report by a psychologist which stated: "Marked sexual preoccupation hampers her objectivity." It makes no mention of comic books—but it seems to me that they "hampered her objectivity" most.

Frequently children remember only snatches from comics. A fifteen-year-old girl, asked which comics she remembered, said, "I like one where a man puts a needle in a woman's eye. The eye is all bloodshot and frightened. And another one with a hunchback man carrying a woman from the grave or to the grave. I read four or five a day." This is typical of how crime comics are reflected in a child's mind. Nothing here of crime prevention or of ethical lessons.

Many children, when asked what comic books they like, answer simply like the ten-year-old who reads ten a week, "I like murder comics."

One of the horror-type comic books for children is called *Nightmare, A Psychological Study*. It is about a young man who mixes up nightmares with reality and dies a horrible death, buried when the cement foundation of a building is poured over him. He has received incompetent advice from a psychiatrist, Dr. Froyd, who, on his office door is called "Dr. Fredric Froyd, psychiatrist." (Shades of Dr. Frederick Muttontop!)

The literary style of this "psychological study" shows the same predilection for non-language expletives familiar in other comics. The psychiatric defenders of the comic-book industry maintain that this kind of thing helps Junior with his emotional self-expression. And the educational defenders of the industry claim it helps him with his literary expression.

Another story, a "scientific Suspensstory" (sic!), illustrates how many crime comic stories cannot be described as giving any "emotional release" because apart from their other inadequacies they do not come to any end. The taste for violence is

aroused—and maintained. The story begins with “a hideous thing” and ends:

“The doctor is dead! But where is the THING? WHERE?? WHERE IS IT RIGHT NOW?”

Once in the waiting room of the Clinic I saw a little boy crouched over a comic book, oblivious to everything around him. In passing I could see the title of the story he was reading. Big capitals spelled out *T A R Z A N*. Surely, I thought, the adventures of Tarzan are harmless enough for juveniles of any age. But I was misled, as many parents no doubt are. When I looked at this comic later I found on the inside cover the picture of a man tied up in an agonizing position—a man “found dead in a Dallas park, his hands tied behind him and two bullets in his worthless carcass”; another man shot in the back as he is thrown out of a car (“Get out, ya stinking rat!”)—and more of the same. *Tarzan* was not the whole title of the story I had seen the boy in the waiting room reading. There was a subtitle “The Wyoming Killer” and two other headings, “From Police Files” and “A True Crime Story.” The story was not about Tarzan, but about a hero who robbed a bank and shot five men to death.

III

The Road to the Child

Methods of Examination

“And then one should search . . . for connections, conditions and situations that have acted at once or slowly, and with which perhaps the origin of the abnormal deviation may be justifiably linked . . . Moreover, it is necessary to understand why these conditions and situations have brought about such results in the patient, when in another person they would occur without the slightest effect; and furthermore, why they all lead in the case of one person to just such an abnormal complex, while in another to a totally different one.”

—Pavlov

The problem of what comic books do to children, or rather what they have already done to a whole generation, is three-fold. Its solution requires a knowledge of comic books, of the minds of children, and of the processes, the mechanisms, by which comic-book reading influences children. When, for example, a young child hangs himself and beneath the dead child is found an open comic book luridly describing and depicting a hanging (as has happened in a number of cases), the mechanics of the relationship between the two have to be investigated, e.g. the processes of imitation and experimentation in childhood.

To study the psychological effects of comics on children one must first have more than a superficial and scanty knowledge of what is in them. For if in children's nightmares or in their play or in their productions in psychological tests, any association or reference occurs to the "Venusians" or "Voltamen," to "a syntho-shade" or to the precise instructions on how to "case wealthy homes" for burglaries, you will not understand the response if you do not know the stimulus.

Several times when some of the earlier results of our research were presented, somebody from the field of child care would get up to state that he had never seen a child who, was influenced by comic books. This statement in itself is preposterous, of course. For nothing that occupies a child for several hours a day over a long period can be entirely without influence on him. The trouble with these arguments was that these people had not studied the contents of comic books, had failed for years to take notice of their very existence as a potentially harmful factor, and had never examined children for their influence. Or the proud protagonists of negative results had—without realizing the implications—even encouraged children to read crime comic books as recreation and proper mental nourishment!

The same is true for superintendents of institutions for delinquents who have stated their opinion that there is no con-

nection between the behavior of juveniles and crime-comic-book reading. How would they have found out, sitting at their desks far removed both physically and psychologically from the lives of the inmates, to whom for years in these institutions crime comic books have been fed as a steady diet? One Lafargue psychiatrist who worked for a time in a big state reformatory for boys has vividly described how many hours these confined children spend on crime comic books (with which the reformatory is filled to the brim) and his dismay at seeing how children who had got into trouble while reading many crime comics were sentenced to years of incarceration to read even more of them. That is one of the paradoxes of the social problem of crime comic books: that those with authority over children have *for years* neglected to pay any attention to this literature, which for many children is practically their only reading, have prescribed it for children in their charge as remedy and recreation, have paid no attention to the consequences, and now state as their professional opinion that comic books do not do any harm. Those are not the ways of science.

Such opinions show that these reformatory officials not only do not have enough contact with their charges, but also are not sufficiently acquainted with the observations of their employees. A number of psychologists and social workers employed in reformatories have told us over the years what an unwholesome influence comic books are in these institutions. Others have told us that supervisors in reformatories—like many parents—give lots of crime comics to children in order to keep them quiet. As an example of the problems comic books present in reformatories, one social worker stated that “when it came to drawing, the boys drew pictures from the comic books that showed violence or a preoccupation with unhealthy sexual attitudes.”

The method we have used is to read, over the years, very many comic books and analyze and classify them from as many points of view as possible. Many different patterns can be discerned in them, according to publisher, writer, draftsmen, the

prevailing trend and the special genre. A lot of comic books have come to us from children themselves. And if it was feasible, whenever children referred to something they had seen in a comic book we asked them to bring us that particular comic book. When they no longer had it, we added its name to a list of "wanted" comics and tried to get it later on.

It is not scientifically sound to narrow down the problem to whether the influence of comic books is just "good" or "bad." That cannot be a sound starting-point. The question is, do they have a discernible influence, and if they have how does it work, how intense and lasting is it, and in what fields and regions of the child's mind does it manifest itself. This is exactly how I started.

When *Time* magazine, at one stage of my investigations, reported my statement that the violence of crime comic books is a contributing factor to the increasing violence in juvenile delinquency, the father of a boy of four wrote a critical letter to the magazine in which he said, "It occurs to me that Dr. Wertham takes a child's mind too seriously." Is it *possible* to take a child's mind "too seriously"? Is anything to be gained by the current cheap generalization that healthy normal children are not affected by bad things and that for unhealthy abnormal children bad things do not make much difference either, because the children are bad anyhow? It is my growing conviction that this view is a wonderful excuse for adults to do whatever they choose. They can conceal their disregard for social responsibility behind a scientific-sounding abstraction which is not even true and can proceed either to exploit children's immaturity or permit it to be exploited by whole industries.

In the ordinary process of education children are told that they should listen and learn. In the psychiatric investigation of children's minds just the opposite is true: it is we who have to listen and learn. And this is what I and my associates have tried to do throughout our research.

Child psychologists often publish results of studies based on the questionnaire method. They take a group of children and ask them: "Do you do this (or that)? How often do you do it? Do you read this (or that)? What do you like better (this or that)?"—and so on. This questionnaire method is inadequate. To ask children a series of simple questions and expect real enlightenment from their answers is even more misleading than to carry out the same procedure with adults. The younger the child, the more erroneous are the conclusions likely to be drawn. Children love to express themselves, but giving hard and fast answers to hard and fast questions is neither their favorite nor their natural method. Even if they do their best, the procedure is crude and leaves out all the finer shades of the dynamics of childhood thinking. On this premise we decided from the very beginning not to rely on any single method, but to use all the methods of modern child psychiatry which were suitable and possible in the individual case.

If one wants to go beyond narrow formal questions and intends to include the largest variety of different children, it would be a top-heavy procedure to start and execute a study devoted to one factor such as comic books alone. For this reason we have from the beginning integrated our studies of comic books with our general routine work in mental hygiene and child psychiatry. Good clinical work is good clinical research. In other words, in doing thorough clinical work the psychiatrist cannot help reaching into unexplored no-man's land. It will happen again and again that in cases that seem baffling in their symptomatology, refractory to treatment or show unusual manifestations, he will come up against new factors that are not in the books.

Starting on such a wide basis, the material available for this study covered the largest cross-section of children as they are seen in mental hygiene clinics: children who were referred by every variety of public and private child-care agency; who had come to the attention of the juvenile part of the Police Bureau

or the Children's Courts; who were seen in the course of private practice or were confined for observation in psychiatric wards for adolescents, or were confined for physical diseases in pediatric wards, or seen in pediatric clinics. A large proportion of children were normal children who came to our attention for some social reason, including children of superior endowment, who were candidates for scholarships for special educational facilities. The upper age limit of children in whom we were most interested (although we did not adhere to it rigidly) was sixteen. Data were obtained also from older teen-agers and adults referring to their earlier comic-book-reading stage.

The reasons given why contact was sought for these children with physicians or psychiatrists or psychologists or social workers usually did not include any reference to comic books. But from the very beginning there were cases where the reading of comic books was part of the complaint. In these cases the main complaint was what the Reverend Shelton Hale Bishop, an authority on juvenile gangs, called the "extreme avidity" of their comic-book reading. "These comics may be a counterpart of what youngsters see in the movies," he said, "but at least they cannot live with the movies day in and day out as they do with their comics. They take them to bed with them. They walk along the street on their way to school reading them. When they go on an outing for sheer fun, for vacation, along goes an average of five or six magazines per child, and an abnormal amount of attention is given them. They read them going; they read them there; they read them coming home; they swap them; so that the whole thing borders on extreme and abnormal avidity."

If all the children who pass through a period of this "extreme and abnormal avidity" were really sick children in the first place, as experts of the comic-book industry would have us believe, this would be a sick generation. But such arguments are so superficial, and so evidently special pleading, that the only thing worth noting about them is that so many adults are naive

enough to give them credence. It is necessary to analyze the comic books themselves, the children in relation to them and the social conditions under which these children live.

The cases in which comic books figured in the original complaint can be illustrated by a typical statement that we have heard many times. A social acquaintance asked me about his nephew: "My sister has a little boy. He reads comic books all the time. And I've seen him—it is all the time! He lives in one of those dream worlds. He's always interested in these books. All his concentration goes to that. All his excitement comes from these comic books. He doesn't even go out to play ball." I have never heard such a complaint about harmless animal comics.

The very fact that in the beginning we did not know the best advice to give in such cases was an added incentive to keep up our studies. The common assumption that the child must be "unhealthy in the first place" proved in most instances to have no relation at all to the facts. What *was* unhealthy in most instances were the comic books when we inspected them. Children, like adults, without necessarily being sick or neurotic, are different in their powers of resistance to such stimulations.

Another typical case where comic books figured in the reasons for referral was an eight-year-old boy who had suddenly begun to take money in his home. This boy was brought up in a cultured and secure home. He had been reading comic books, some of which he bought in a near-by candy store where large quantities of them were alluringly displayed. His father, a physician, told me, "He says he knows he's doing wrong, but he wants the money for comic books. He hasn't spent it on anything else. He has comic books all over the house. He reads them at the table and doesn't eat properly. Last summer when he went to camp every child had comic books and he brought a big bundle home with him. These books distract him from doing his lessons. Why, he's even gotten a sex angle from them. He told his mother that if she'd take off her blouse she'd be as pretty as a comic-book girl! What shall we do about him?"

The father himself, a gentle person, had taken the drastic step of burning up all the comic books he found in his house.

Over the last few years cases of this type have greatly increased: the young child in the grip of the lure of comic books, the frustrated parent who is baffled by this invasion of his home by a powerful industry. But even so, cases that came to our attention just on account of comic-book reading form only a small proportion.

The psychiatric study of children is in general not nearly so standardized as that of adults. The so-called *mental status*, that is to say the formal examination for the more gross symptoms, such as disorientation or defects of judgment, or mood disorders, is not very productive. In adults we can take the life history of a patient and learn a great deal about him from his reactions to typical outer events. And we can proceed to study his inner life history as a sequence unfolding according to a certain pattern. The life history of children is not only briefer, but presents the paradox that while one can understand it only if one has a good picture of the child's environment, the story itself is an inner life history.

I have gone over many psychiatric charts of children taken in hospitals, in clinics and by consultants of private agencies. And I have often been astonished how few quotes, if any, they contain, of what the children themselves actually say.

We have given routine psychiatric examinations to children where they are interviewed by a psychiatrist. We have taken the history of the child's development from his parents, or from those with whom he has lived and who brought him up. Whenever possible, social workers have studied the child's social environment, obtained school reports, interviewed teachers, and relayed information from other agencies who had contact with the child or his family. In the same way, pertinent information was obtained from hospitals, private doctors and clergymen. In cases where courts were involved, probation reports were added to the record or probation officers interviewed.

In cases where children confided to us that they belonged to gangs and gave us permission to speak to other gang members, we made an attempt to hear their story. As much as possible we tried to ascertain the recreational influences to which children are exposed: games, community centers, radio, television, books. It is in that setting and with that perspective that we began to realize and ascertain the influence of comic books.

To establish proper circumstances which give a child the chance to express himself is difficult. Children do not like doctors' offices any more than adults do. Nor do they like being asked embarrassing questions in front of their parents. The way to gain their confidence is to treat them as persons in their own right. The paradox that this goes beyond examination and in itself is a step in therapy should not deter one. All child psychology worthy of the name is very close to educational and re-educational methods. It is in the very process of education that the child is best understood.

If one wishes to obtain the spontaneous expressions of children, it is only the amateur who attempts to exclude himself and then observe some pseudospontaneous reaction of the child. Children do not dislike authority. On the contrary, they have a strong inner urge to find and follow authorities whom they can trust. They may not always understand what is best for them, but they learn that, and a large part of a child's inner life consists in this search, disappointment, finding and retrospective correction. If the examining psychiatrist tries to eliminate himself as a personality and as an adult whom the child knows to be older and therefore more experienced, he will get only artificial results.

In children's lives other persons, parents especially, of course, but also older and younger siblings, play an important role. So it is necessary to obtain a picture of these other *dramatis personae*, not only as they are reflected in the child's mind, but as they really are. Interviewing younger children to hear what they have to say of a child is often very enlightening, sometimes

more so than what parents say. Yet I have rarely seen in charts a quotation of what brothers or sisters have to say about a young patient. In our study of crime comic books it was interesting to see siblings because comic books are often a family affair. Younger children clandestinely or openly read the comics of their older brothers and sisters.

The application of psychological tests is apt to be overdone in a mechanical way. Yet they are indispensable to child psychiatry. The Rorschach (ink blot) Test, if expertly and judiciously interpreted, was an important tool in our study. This test consists of a series of ten ink-blot pictures. The subject is asked what he sees in them. It should not be given by itself, but should always be correlated with clinical findings and other tests. We have noticed that in Rorschach tests children may see forms that adults usually do not see. Investigated, they often turn out to be forms related to what they have seen in comic books, especially weird and horror comics, e.g. ghost forms, fantastic hands, etc. These are apt to be misinterpreted by psychologists as meaning complex-determined anxieties and phobias, whereas actually they are just reminiscences from comic-book illustrations. Here according to our findings an important inroad has been made into children's imagination and imagery, and of course also into their actions.

A boy of ten came to the Clinic with the main complaint that "he won't concentrate on his schoolwork." He had previously had a psychiatric examination through a public social agency where he received the customary cliché diagnosis of "deep emotional disorder" and where it was noted that "his mother is seductive and stimulating to him." A Rorschach report stressed his "underlying feelings of hostility and destructiveness" and stated that the boy "is attempting to repress his hostile and destructive tendencies at the expense of spontaneity."

When we studied this boy carefully, we found that he had a difficult father, but the imagery of his destructiveness came mainly from the fact that he was an inveterate reader of "mur-

der comics." His real life difficulty was that he could not read. ("I don't read comic books. I only look at pictures.") Thus the correct interpretation of the Rorschach Test responses needs a knowledge of the whole picture and of the period in which the child lives. Circumstances in the United States today are different from those in the Switzerland of decades ago when Dr. Rorschach devised and worked out his test.

When pronounced hostile and threatening images are found in the Rorschach Test, they usually come from one of three causes. First, a special atmosphere of hostility in the early environment, parents' fights and family discords, or gang-dominated schools or neighborhoods. Secondly, such images occur in a relatively very small number of really psychotic and psychopathic children. Thirdly, they are derived from outside influences such as comic books. In the frequently hackneyed routine of the examination of children, ingrained tendencies or the narrower family situation are usually held responsible. But careful examination of factors shows usually a combination of the first and third groups. An eleven-year-old boy of superior intelligence showed in the Rorschach Test (and in his drawings) strife, hostility and threatening images. He lived with parents who for years had gone from battle to battle, and from court to court. In addition, he was steeped in crime-comics lore:

"My mother doesn't like me to read crime comic books, but I see them anyhow. I like *Superman*, *Penalty*. I like the *Jumbo* books. They have a lot of girls in them. There is a lot of fighting in them. There are men and women fighting. Sometimes they kill the girls, they strangle them, shoot them. Sometimes they poison them. In that magazine *Jumbo* they often stab them. The girl doesn't do the stabbing very often, she gets stabbed more often. Sometimes the girls stab the men, sometimes shoot them. I read one comic book where they tie people to the trees, tie them in front of stampeding herds. They tie them to the trees, then cut the trees and the sap runs over that person and the bugs are drawn to that sap, then they eat the people. Some-

times they torture girls the same way, by stabbing and beating them. They throw them in rivers and make them swim where alligators come. Sometimes they hit them with weapons on the back. They don't have much on when they hit them with weapons. It excites me a little bit."

Is it not natural that the Rorschach of the boy shows hostility and aggression?

The Rorschach Test is a valid scientific method. I was one of the first psychiatrists to use it in this country and published research on it over twenty years ago. In my experience with children and adults I have found it a revealing auxiliary method. But in recent years it has been too often used uncritically, interpreted with the bias of a purely biological determinism, leaving out all social influence, and given by psychologists with either faulty clinical orientation, or with no clinical orientation at all. Under these circumstances, the Rorschach Test like any other wrongly applied scientific method has given wrong results. It has been used, for example, to bolster the conception of more or less fixed psychological-biological phases of childhood development. And this is a conception which has caused parents whose children do not conform to textbooks a great deal of anxiety. It has led psychologists to socially unrealistic generalizations. A recent text on children's Rorschach responses describes as the "essence" of the average normal seven-year-old child a most abnormal preoccupation with morbidity, mutilation, pain, decay, blood and violence. But that is *not* the normal essence of the average American child, nor of any other child! You cannot draw true conclusions from any test if you ignore the broad educational, social and cultural influences on the child, his family and his street. These influences, of which comic books are just one (although a very potent one), favor, condone, purvey and glorify violence. The violent meaning of the Rorschach responses is not the norm for the age of seven; unfortunately it seems to be becoming the norm for a civilization of adults.

A popular syndicated column for parents on child behavior (emanating from the Gesell Institute) processes these findings for the popular consumption of parents. It concludes that "the environment—the radio, movies and funny books" have nothing to do with the child's lust for gore, his love of the horrible. "We believe these preferences to be the normal expressions of the child's likes at his age." Parents who read such a misleading column are of course disarmed by the supposed evidence of such a scientific method as the Rorschach Test. They tend to blame their child or themselves and in so doing they give the industries that peddle stories and programs of violence for children a free hand.

In the Thematic Apperception Test the child is shown a series of pictures depicting various scenes and is asked to tell stories about them. We found in some children preoccupation with stories of murder, blood-letting and violence in one form or another. But if one does not appreciate that this kind of production occurs much more in avid crime-comics readers than in other children, one is apt completely to misinterpret the test. This test also showed us that comic-book reading leaves definite traces in the child's mind which crop up as spontaneous manifestations in a projective test.

The Mosaic Test we give routinely to the children. The child has a choice of a large number of mosaic pieces of different colors and shapes. He is asked to put them on a tray and make any design he pleases. The test is very useful in a diagnosis or for ruling out of psychotic conditions, even inconspicuous and incipient ones. These tests revealed in a large series of cases that there is nothing intrinsically abnormal about those children who either became very addicted to reading crime comics or are influenced by such reading to delinquent acts. As a matter of fact, the Mosaic Test—in conjunction, of course, with clinical findings—indicated or confirmed our finding that those children who suffer from any really serious intrinsic psycho-

pathological condition, including those with psychoses, are *less* influenced by comic-book reading.

Intelligence tests and aptitude tests were of course given routinely in all cases where there was any question of the adequacy of intellectual endowment and resources. For the study of the effects of comic books, complete tests for reading ability were found to be of crucial importance. Many statements about children's reading have been made off and on which are not based on a really full and specific study of reading by the various tests devised for this purpose. The harmful effect of comic-book reading on children's ability to read is a special chapter and a sorry one.

A test which is no longer used as much as it should be, the Association Test, we found particularly useful. The associations to words which are complex indicators may reveal preoccupations and fantasies which cannot be obtained on a conscious level, certainly not by questioning. In cases where children are accused of serious delinquencies, the Association Test functions like a "lie detector" test and has helped us to reconstruct what really happened.

A boy of ten was referred to the Clinic after he had been accused of pushing a younger boy into the water so that the small boy drowned. Another boy had seen him do it, but since he himself denied it the authorities felt it was one boy's word against another and the case was dismissed as "accidental death." The Clinic was asked to give the suspected boy emotional guidance. He had previously thrown stones at windows and on one occasion had hit and almost injured a woman in this way.

He was a voracious comic-book reader. His mother stated that he read whatever comic books he could get hold of. He said, "I like all the crime comic books. I like all kinds, science, everything that is ever in the house. I buy quite a few. I get them from my friends. Some of them give them to me and some of them loan them to me. I like crime comics such as *Clue*. It is

all about when this man, he and three other men, they robbed jewelry and broke windows and they took the rings and ran away and a cop's car comes and shoots them. Sometimes they get killed, the gangsters, the cops kill them. Sometimes they hit each other when one of them does something wrong. Sometimes they use knives."

He was known to be a bully. He had bullied the boy who was drowned to such an extent that the boy's mother had gone to the authorities to ask for protection for her boy. Steeped in crime-comics lore, his attitude was a mixture of bravado and evasiveness. Nothing indicated that he had any feelings of guilt. The Association Test showed a definite blocking to key words such as *drowning*, *water*, *little boy* and *pushing*. After careful study of the whole case we came to the conclusion that the little boy would not have drowned if our boy had not pushed him in, and that our patient would not have been pushed to the murder if his mind had not been imbued with readiness for violence and murder by his continuous comic-book reading.

Another useful method for closer examination of young children is the Duess Test, which has been worked out in Switzerland and used in France. It is indispensable for the correct understanding of some children. With its help one can sometimes unearth subtle psychological factors not brought out by other methods.

The test consists in ten very brief fablelike stories. They are incomplete and after they are told to the child he is asked what the end of the story would be. In this way the child can complete the story in any way he likes. This test should be used in an elastic way. It should not be applied rigidly and should not be scored like a test. One can modify the original stories and can even add new ones to adapt them to the original case. I give the test in a way that is a mixture between telling a story, playing a game and asking a question. The Duess Test

is often an interesting starting-point for further talks with a child.

The Dues Test can be given only to young children, the upper age limit being, in my experience, about eleven. In suitable cases the child projects himself into the story and identifies his own situation with that in the fable. In this way typical emotional complexes may be elicited, but, as in other tests, one should be careful not to view the child as if he were an adult neurotic or read too much abnormality into him.

Two contrasting examples will illustrate the method. A boy of ten was treated at the Clinic for a behavior disorder. He gave inconspicuous answers to the first nine fables. The tenth fable goes like this:

A child wakes up tired in the morning, and says:
"Oh, what a bad dream I had!" What did he dream?

This boy replied, "He dreamed about something he didn't like. It might have been something like a murder. He's gonna get murdered and he woke up."

Study of this boy did not reveal any special hostilities or resentments. During one talk with him he told me that he liked *Classics* comics. "What are they?" I asked. "The Classics," he explained to me, "are the kind that tell a story, like under the water.—I can't remember them." When I told him I was very much interested in all kinds of comic books he confided in me that what he *really* liked and read a lot was crime comics. "I got a whole pile of *Crime Does Not Pay!*" Would it not be surprising if such a child did *not* have murder on his mind?

The other case is a girl of nine, referred to the Clinic because she was a severe reading problem and was described as "very nervous." She also was a great comic-book reader. These are her responses to three fables:

FABLE I

A father bird and a mother bird and their little baby bird are asleep in their nest on the branch of a tree. But there

comes a big storm. It breaks the branch of the tree and the nest falls to the ground. The father bird flies quickly to one tree, the mother bird to another tree. What will the baby bird do? He knows how to fly a little.

HER ANSWER

He will die because he can't fly so well.

FABLE III

A mother sheep and her little lamb are in a field. Every evening the mother sheep gives the little lamb good warm milk, which the little lamb likes very much. But it can already eat grass. One day the mother sheep has a new little lamb which is hungry for the mother to give him milk. But the mother sheep has not enough milk for both little lambs, so she says to the first lamb: "I haven't got enough milk for both of you, go and eat some fresh grass."

What will the lamb do?

HER ANSWER

Eat the grass. Get mad because he doesn't want the other little lamb to drink the milk.

FABLE IV

Somebody in the family has taken the train and has gone very far away and will never return home.

Who is it? Who can go away in the family?

HER ANSWER

The mother. She can go out in the country. Maybe she doesn't come back because she is mad at the father. Maybe she liked it there better. Or they could get hurt by a car. They could be dead. The mother could be dead.

The test results show indications of intrinsic psychological factors. The extrinsic situational influence of comic-book reading played only a minor role. Further analysis of this child showed that she had ticlike movements at times and suffered from compulsions. For example, she had to touch the ground with her hand. She had death wishes and profound feelings of

hostility. Comic books did not intrude in her emotional life because she was too preoccupied with herself and had already built up such abnormal defenses as compulsions. All this started five years previously at the birth of her baby sister, of whom she was intensely jealous.

Children are apt to express themselves more easily and naturally when other children are around. Playroom observation is an indispensable adjunct of scientific psychiatric studies of children. It is almost the opposite of the questionnaire method. There are no questions, but only answers. There are no inquisitive adults, but only fellow children. One or two adults observe inconspicuously—but not pretending that they are not there. They participate only as catalysts. A group of children for the playroom does not have to be of the same age, and the sexes should be mixed. We have found that the most suitable age is from about five to ten, but children up to twelve can also be included.

Playroom techniques have been criticized because they are at once a diagnostic and a therapeutic tool. But in my experience this is actually a great advantage. Play technique is frequently successful in both areas. And it is theoretically a sound principle to do psychological exploring studies on a child in the process of treatment, education and re-education. Pedagogy, psychotherapy of children and child psychology should become recognized more and more as closely related and inseparable disciplines.

With a grant from the Child Neurology Research Foundation to work out methods for the observation and treatment of children, I organized a playroom in the middle thirties, while I was director of the Mental Hygiene Clinic at Bellevue Hospital. The case material and our methods in general were the same as those on which these studies are based. One of the main differences in the outer circumstances of the children is that until the end of the thirties there were no crime comic books to speak of, whereas in the forties they had, with respect to

the time they take up, become one of the most important influences on children's lives.

In our play observations and therapy, children are engaged in spontaneous play activity of a type that permits them to express themselves as fully as possible. Any games with set rules or reading of books are considered an obstacle. The children construct buildings with mechanical building sets of wood and metal, draw, paint, make mosaics with colored stones, and work with clay.

Watching children in this setting, one learns how false is the idea that if left to themselves, with opportunity for constructive play, they will pay no attention to that and will instead seek outlets for "aggression."

In the early forties one of the activities children sometimes wanted to keep up instead of engaging in spontaneous activity was reading comic books. Protocols of the play group would contain entries like this: "Entered playroom with his own comic book and kept looking at it," or "Greeted the others, friendly, then took a comic book and sat down to read it." This was in the early period of the rise of the crime comic book. In this atmosphere of the playroom it is easy to ask a child why and what he reads.

Comparison of our continuing observations led to definite conclusions. Of course young children are apt to be "wild," and I saw plenty of them in the thirties. But it was a natural wildness. Many children in the period some ten years later showed a kind of artificial wildness, with a dash of adult brutality and violence far from childlike. From comic books they derive ideas of activity and excitement not in the form of concentrated imaginative play, but in the form of crude and combative action. Of course this kind of thing is not found by those who work with questionnaire methods or with preconceived conclusions.

A boy of seven suffered from asthma and was "inattentive" in school. He improved with play therapy. It was noted that in-

stead of playing he liked to pore over comic books a lot of the time. We weaned him away from them by giving him material to draw and paint with. But the comic-book spirit was very evident in his art productions. He drew Donald Duck with a gun and his drawings always showed "the robber shooting the cop." (That the opposite could also occur never seemed apparent from any of his numerous drawings.)

A number of children whom I had observed at an early age in the playroom I followed up later as adolescents. That provided a good background for evaluating the later impact of comic books and other factors. After I had convinced myself that comic books like this are a bad influence, I had to face the question, Why not advise parents to forbid children to read crime comics in the very beginning, to forestall adverse influences? But that is not so simple. Crime comic books are not an individual problem, they are a social problem. While it is not true that every child is a crime comics reader, crime comic books are available nearly everywhere children go. To forbid what is constantly and temptingly available is bad pedagogic practice. Moreover, children come constantly in contact with other children and get the effects from them, either with or without comic books. As far as abstaining from reading them is concerned, that is not easy for any child in this comic-book-selling and -promoting world. It is unfair to put that task on their shoulders. They need the help of adults, not only in one family at a time but on a much larger scale.

To advise a child not to read a comic book works only if you can explain to him your reasons. For example, a ten-year-old girl from a cultivated and literate home asked me why I thought it was harmful to read *Wonder Woman* (a crime comic which we have found to be one of the most harmful). She saw in her home many good books and I took that as a starting point, explaining to her what good stories and novels are. "Supposing," I told her, "you get used to eating sandwiches made with very strong seasonings, with onions and peppers and highly

spiced mustard. You will lose your taste for simple bread and butter and for finer food. The same is true of reading strong comic books. If later on you want to read a good novel it may describe how a young boy and girl sit together and watch the rain falling. They talk about themselves and the pages of the book describe what their innermost little thoughts are. This is what is called literature. But you will never be able to appreciate that if in comic-book fashion you expect that at any minute someone will appear and pitch both of them out of the window." In this case the girl understood, and the advice worked.

Play observation and therapy are sometimes misunderstood by those inexperienced in the method and by the public. Violently destructive play is interpreted as a natural phase of child development and the erroneous idea is propagated that it will be advantageous to the child to let him indulge in violence as much as he likes. For example, a recent popularized medical column is headed "Play Therapy Lets Child Vent His Anger On Toys." And then it goes on to describe, as if it were a common occurrence, how a little boy who hated his mother and sister strangled two dolls and tried to dismember them. The same boy stuck pins into another doll supposed to represent the doctor. The physician who writes the column takes for granted that the emotion which children express in the playroom should be hostility. He says, "The therapist accepts fighting and interrupts only when it is obvious that someone is going to be hurt." He takes it for granted that chairs will be broken! But this is all wrong. Most children do not engage in such violence, and certainly not from ingrained tendencies, and if they do, a good therapist would certainly analyze the causes for such violence early and help the child to understand and overcome it.

As another procedure of investigation, children were allowed to play with a marionette stage. They made up their own plays, usually with one child doing the outline and filling it in with suggestions from one or two other children. The plot outline

was usually very simple, with the play consisting largely in improvisations. The marionettes represented such figures as permitted the child to symbolize a father-figure, a mother-figure, siblings and other *dramatis personae* in his life. Marionette shows sometimes reveal very well the psychological factors in the family constellation.

We used this method for children from five to twelve. Before joining this group children were not asked about comic books. It was interesting to see how the concrete inspiration for a plot, such as it was, came usually from a real event or from a movie, radio or comic book. Typical crime-comic-book methods appeared in the plays: knife-throwing, throwing somebody out of the window, stomping on people, etc. I later classified the productions (which were taken down by a stenographer) in two groups, *constructive* plays and *destructive* plays. The constructive plays were about parties, family reunions, lovers, dancing, painters in the house, etc. One production was entitled "A Day in Dr. Wertham's Office." Destructive plays were about crime, robbers, spies: "The Robbery in Your Neighborhood Store"; "A Night in Chinatown." Comic-book influences played a role only in the destructive plays. I have seen no constructive play inspired by a comic book. The language in the destructive plays sometimes came directly from comics. In the end the bad man went free or got killed. (He was never caught by the authorities and punished.)

When the performance of the play was over, the child audience of about eight or ten was asked to discuss it and ask questions of the author. This audience reaction had a great deal of spontaneity and was often very revealing with respect to both the child who asked and the child who answered. For example, one child in the audience asked, "Why didn't you make the robber kick the cop?" Or a child author answered a question about where he got the idea for his play, "I got part of it out of a comic book—the part where they throw the Chinaman into the river. The rest I made up for myself."

The children drew their own sets. These sketches were a supplementary source for psychological interpretations. For instance, in a constructive play an eight-year-old boy drew a "playground," a "house" and "on the street." Children who produced destructive plays often made correspondingly aggressive sketches.

I regard it as a major finding that no good marionette-show plots ever came from comic books, although the children read so many of them. The "inspiration" from comic books was never artistic, literary or even a good story. It was a precipitate of fragmentary scenes, violent, destructive and smart-alecky cynical. This was in marked contrast to the inspiration children derived from movies, of which they had seen a much smaller number. It might be objected that a young child is not capable of absorbing and retaining a really good and artistic story from a movie or a real book. Even very young children get something out of a good story and can make something of it. During one of the audience reaction periods after a marionette show, an eight-year-old boy gave his account of the movie *The Grapes of Wrath*:

"I saw *The Grapes of Wrath*. It was very good. It was about a man who got out of prison. He was in Sing Sing, I think. He walked to a place where he heard music. A man came along in a car. He asked for a ride. The man said, 'Don't you see that sign?' Then he said, 'Hop on till we get around the bend.'

"They were walking to the barnyard. A big storm was coming. All the people were gone from the house because the cats came—big tractors. The people had to go to Uncle George. They had to get off the land, and travel, and travel, and travel. The oldest man died. The woman died. They were riding and riding. You see them in the dark without lights, and then it shows the end.

"Only in the end they were happy. They weren't happy at first because they had to get off the land."

Like a good child's drawing, such an account gives essentials in very simplified form. It is children with beautiful minds like this, who can summarize *The Grapes of Wrath* by telling how the people in it "travel and travel and travel," whom we corrupt by throwing them to the 100-million-dollar enterprise of the comic-book industry.

With adolescents, group methods are also useful, as play therapy is for younger children. With the younger children in a group we give more attention to what they do; with older children we get more from what they say.

At the beginning of World War II, I started a special form of group therapy for delinquent and predelinquent children in the Mental Hygiene Clinic of the Queens General Hospital. This was intended primarily for treatment, but it turned out unexpectedly to be one of the most revealing channels of information about the influence of comic books. When this group started I had no intention of taking up that problem, but the subject turned up spontaneously again and again.

The usual age range of members of this group was from thirteen to sixteen. The majority were boys, but there were always some girls. As therapy, the club was more successful than any other method of child guidance, especially of delinquents. This was attested by probation officers and juvenile law enforcement authorities. Some 90 per cent of all those who attended the sessions for prolonged periods (that is, at least one year) are no longer problems to their families, the authorities or themselves. Only children who had got into some kind of trouble were eligible, and the minimum trouble was playing hookey. In many cases much more serious offenses were involved. Most of the children came from one-family-house, middle-class sections of the population.

The name Hookey Club started in this way. I was confronted with several children one day who were truants. While interviewing them as a group, they began questioning one another. This went so well that I asked them to return in a group. Little

by little, whenever children with truancy problems came, my assistants would feed them into the group-therapy class. Once, before one of the weekly meetings, I said to a social worker, "I see the Hookey Club is coming in today." She laughed and repeated the remark, and the name stuck. The Hookey Club developed into a regular institution. The sessions were strictly secret, with only myself and usually a stenographer present. All details remained confidential. At each session the case of one boy or girl or some general topic on someone's mind was discussed. One child functioned as chairman to maintain order. Every boy or girl at the session could question the child whose case was taken up. And everyone could express his opinion about the case. Among the children were always some experts in various forms of delinquency who questioned the child who was up for discussion. Whatever a child might have learned from comic books for the commission of a delinquent act, the group never accepted that as an excuse. Nor did any child ever spontaneously bring it up as an excuse.

Children are more isolated than we think, and have few in whom they can confide without fear of misunderstanding or recrimination. Adults rarely realize how serious children are about their conflicts. They want to be straightened out. They shrink from a judge; but in the Hookey Club, where they were even more severely questioned by their peers, they could speak out fully and openly about anything whatsoever. When children question one another, one can readily see how the troubles of children reflect the troubles and conflicts of society. My experiences with the Hookey Club have confirmed me in my opinion that valuable personality assets slumber in delinquent children. By regarding these children as inferior or emotionally sick or psychopathic, we miss the constellation of social and individual forces that leads to delinquency and deprives these children of really scientific help. To characterize them merely by negative qualities is both unjust and scientifically inaccurate.

Forms of delinquency that adults know little about and chil-

dren frequently encounter, like juvenile extortion rackets, were discussed. "Why did you steal the five dollars?" the thirteen-year-old chairman of one session asked. "I'll explain it to you," answered the fourteen-year-old whose case was being probed. "The older kids in school were getting up a mob and if I did not pay them some money they'd get after me and beat me up." To an adult this may sound like an untrue excuse, but there were always some juvenile experts in the Hookey Club who recognized a social reality when they saw it.

Often boys who practiced the extortion racket themselves were questioned by the group:

Q.: Where did it happen?

A.: In the school yard.

Q.: How did you know he had money?

A.: I asked him how much money has he got, he said a dollar.

Q.: How old was the boy?

A.: About thirteen.

Q.: How did you know he couldn't beat you?

A.: I took money from him before, two weeks before that. I got a wallet and fifteen cents before that.

Q.: Did you do anything worse than the other things?

A.: Yes. I stabbed a boy.

Q.: When was that?

A.: That was last year. The boy was about twelve years old. I stabbed him with a knife, a pocket knife. I stabbed him in the back. They put me in the shelter for two weeks.

In such cases I often found that the whole comic-book ideology and methodology were apparent in both those who answered and those who questioned. The boys evaluated this influence in a matter-of-fact way. A boy replied to questions about a burglary he committed:

"I read comic books where they broke into a place. I got the idea to break into the house. I wanted the money. I couldn't

go through the front door because I didn't have the key. I didn't think of the comic book."

Questioner: "You don't have to think of it, it is in the back of your mind, in your subconscious mind."

A boy who had been arrested because he kicked another boy was questioned:

Q.: What did you do?

A.: We were pitching pennies in school. This kid was cheating. One guy grabbed me and pushed me against a water faucet. He bent down to get the pennies. I took my foot and kicked him in the head. He had two or three stitches in the head.

Q.: It wouldn't have been so bad if you had punched him in the head, but kicking is not right. When you see a comic book, the point is with most fellows, they see that a certain fellow in there does that, they want to be like him and think they are tough and can do the same. In the comic book they might get away with it, in this case you don't.

ANOTHER BOY: The guy who thinks he is a tough guy, he isn't really tough.

The effect of comic-book reading was scrutinized by the club members, because there were always some who had reading difficulties. The members were more critical than some of the pseudo-educators who proclaim that comic books are good for reading. At a session where classics comic books were mentioned, a fourteen-year-old boy said in reply to questions:

"I don't read the comic books. I just look at the pictures. I can read, but I just don't take the time out. Sometimes, when it is a good story, I read it. You would be surprised how much you can learn just by looking at the pictures. If you have a good mind, you can figure things out for yourself. I like the horror science-fiction ones. I just look at the pictures."

In the Hookey Club the group was both judge and jury. I functioned merely as advisor. The children could recommend that a boy be allowed to leave school and be given his working

papers, or that he should stay in school. They could suggest that a boy should not be taken off parole or that he should be. When I had to make a report about a child, the Hookey Club members discussed whether the child should be referred to the Children's Court or should receive supervision by the Juvenile Aid Bureau or should just be left under Hookey Club jurisdiction. Sometimes they suggested that no report be made until they had seen the child in question longer.

Going over the protocols of the Hookey Club it is hard to see how adults can be so naive about the role comic books play in the lives of children. The accounts of the sessions bristled with revealing bits about comic books, a topic that came up again and again in very different connections: a boy bought his switchblade knife through an advertisement from a comic book; a girl bought some phony medicine from a comic book to reduce her weight, which she was self-conscious about; different methods of stealing, burglarizing and hurting people were learned from comic books; comic books were cited to justify cunning, distrust and race ridicule; and so on. The excuses of the industry's experts that comic books show methods to hurt, wound and kill people in order to teach children self-defense did not go with the experts of the Hookey Club. They knew better. Nor did they believe that comic books taught not to commit delinquencies. They knew that what they demonstrate is that one should not make mistakes in committing them. A girl of fourteen who had been stealing had a comic book with her at one session:

THIRTEEN-YEAR-OLD CHAIRMAN: Which comic books do you read mostly?

A.: Girls read mostly *Crimes by Women*.

Q.: Which crimes do women commit?

A.: Murder. They marry a man for his life insurance and then kill him, then marry another man and then just go on like that until they finally get caught. Or they will

be a dancer and meet the wrong kind of a guy and get involved in a bank robbery.

Q.: What's the fun for you in reading that?

A.: It shows you other people's stupid mistakes.

Here are some samples from Hookey Club proceedings:

A FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD DELINQUENT GIRL: In some of the crime comic books kids pick up ideas. They give them ideas of robbery and sex. . . .

Q.: Sex?

A.: Yes, plenty of sex. They show you unexposed [sic] women, men beating up girls and breaking their arms. The fellows see that and they want to try it. They try to wrestle with them and get ideas. I know of fellows who do imitate comic books. When I was young I used to read comic books and I watched the fellows and how they imitated what they did in the books. They tried it with the girls around my way. They tied them up. The boys were around ten or twelve, the girls were the same age. They used to always read the comic books. I asked them what made them do that. They said they saw it in the comic books. They read *Crime, Murder Inc., Crime Does Not Pay*, most of those crime books.

A boy who burglarized stores explained, "I read the comic books to learn how you can get money. I read about thirty a week. I read *Crime Does Not Pay, Crime and Punishment, Penalty, Wanted*. That is all I can think of. There was this one case. It was in back of a factory with pretty rich receipts, money. It showed how you get in through the back door. I didn't copy that. I thought the side door was the best way. I just switched to the skylight. I carried it out practically the same way as the comic book did it, only I had to open two drawers to do it. I didn't do every crime book, some of them were difficult. Some of them I just imitated. I had to think the rest out myself. I know other boys who learned how to do such jobs from comic books."

From the discussion of the case of a fourteen-year-old girl who had been caught shoplifting:

TWELVE-YEAR-OLD BOY: I saw a comic book where they do shoplifting. This girl was shoplifting and she was caught. They took her down to the Police Department. It was a love story. When she got married she still shoplifted and she broke down and told her husband. I didn't like it. It was the only thing I had to read. It might give a girl ideas to shoplift.

FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD BOY: They get the idea, if she gets away with it, why can't I get away with it. I saw a book where a man has a hanger in his coat with hooks on. He opens his coat and shoves things in and it disappears. It was a crime comic book. . . . The kids see that these men get away with it. They say, let's try it. They learn the method of putting it in a jacket. They teach you how to do it in the comic book. They didn't notice it until somebody jumped on this man and the things fell out. Otherwise they would not have caught him.

From a discussion on fighting in school:

THIRTEEN-YEAR-OLD BOY: I learned from crime comic books when you want to hit a man don't get face to face—hit him from the back.

FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD (contradicting): In comic books they hit them in the eye!

From an all-round discussion on fairy tales:

Superman is a fairy story.

No, it is not a fairy story. It is a comic book. The comic books, they are mostly murder or something funny, but the fairy tales, they are just stories.

The comics like *Superman* are not true, they don't happen, but they might happen or could happen. The fairy tales, they just can't happen.

In the fairy tales they don't get killed.

At one Hookey Club session I had another psychiatrist present as a guest. The question of comic books and my criticism of them came up:

FOURTEEN-YEAR-OLD (*addressing Dr. W.*): I think it is stupid. You are the only psychiatrist who is really interested. Maybe there are five others . . . out of five thousand—how can you get any headway? You spend close to maybe a thousand dollars and it is stupid. You can't stand a chance against these comic-book publishers.

FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD: That is right, because they got the police to put in a good word for the comic books. Like before, they used to have policemen and policewomen say it is a good influence for the children. They had a police lady and a police chief in every edition of *Crime Does Not Pay*. That is one of the reasons why you have no chance.

THE FOURTEEN-YEAR-OLD: I noticed in *Crime Does Not Pay* they give two dollars a letter for what's on your mind. People write beautiful letters saying this comic book is good for children—anything to earn two dollars.

ANOTHER FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD: Gals don't approve of guys going to poolrooms in Brooklyn. They pay for protection. They take a switchblade and if a guy don't pay them a dollar, they will rip up the table. . . . I have been in with them. . . . You could learn that from a comic book, too. . . . I read some of that in *Crime Does Not Pay*.

SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLD: The guys, the big racketeers and stuff, they pay the guys maybe to put something in crime comic books that is good. The other boys think it is a good idea. So they start doing it and get into the Youth House, and when they get back they work for the racketeers. They make a lot of money and everything and stuff. They want the young boys to read the crime comic books to get ideas. The boys are about seventeen when the racketeers use them for dope and stuff, to peddle it, and to run the numbers. . . . I think crime comic books are there to make the kids into bad boys, so that they can make some money. I figure maybe these gangsters they say: a couple of years

from now, when these guys grow up, I'll give them a number racket and I can be the big guy then. Sometimes they need gunmen to eliminate the other big guys. The comic books show about that, too, about racing and stuff.

GUEST PSYCHIATRIST: What was that you said about Youth House?

THE SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLD: The racketeers want to send you to Youth House, and Warwick, too, so that you get really bad. . . . They want you to go there so that people will be scared of you. . . . If you have a record, everybody will be scared of you. You know how people are in the neighborhood, people say so-and-so was in Youth House and in Warwick. . . . If you walk in with a gun, they are scared of you.

THE FOURTEEN-YEAR-OLD (*addressing the psychiatric guest*): This is no insult to you. If you got a thousand dollar check for these funny books, would you talk against them? They give some people side money, so they write, "Approved by Dr. So-and-So: Good Reading Matter for Children."

My psychiatric guest felt that the Hookey Club was a little rough.

An indispensable method in psychological studies of children is to let them draw. There is an extraordinary discrepancy between all the details, especially sexual details, found by psychologists in children's drawings, and their having overlooked the much grosser, endlessly repeated sexual symbolizations in countless comic-book illustrations. Had they analyzed comic books as searchingly as they analyzed children's drawings, the results would have shown an utterly abnormal and unhealthy literature.

Sometimes I have asked children to copy anything they like out of their comic books. Then I have shown these productions to psychologists (without telling that they were copies from comic-book illustrations) and asked for interpretations—routine interpretations such as they make of other children's draw-

ings. Here is a psychologist's interpretation of a drawing made by a boy of a typical comic-book illustration of a pirate:

This drawing is bristling with phallic symbols—the sword, the outstretched arm, the big gun stuck under the belt, the conspicuous belt buckle and the shirt opened down to the belt; the way the legs are posed and the boots are drawn has some phallic quality, too. The actual genitals are extremely accentuated. The figure is that of a very glamorous man. He looks seductive. The whole body is emphasized more than the head, and there is very little attempt at control.

This child was preoccupied with sexual ideas. He is very aggressive sexually—not someone who would ask nicely, but who takes (rapes).

This drawing was a more-or-less exact copy of a comic-book illustration. All the features mentioned in the psychologist's report were present equally—if not more so—in the original comic-book picture (which, incidentally, had right next to it the picture of a sexy girl with half-nude and bulging breasts). This was just a run-of-the-mill comic-book illustration. If the psychologists find in the child who makes such a drawing an excessive and aggressive preoccupation with sex, why should the same description not apply to innumerable comic-book illustrations? And does one get rid of excessive preoccupation with sexual aggression by just looking at a lot of pictures like this?

Spontaneous children's drawings which are not copies are often influenced by the pictures in comics. As a matter of fact, the child psychologist who does not take into account these subconscious reminiscences of imagery is apt to fall into error. If he disregards the comic-book influence, he misinterprets the result. He will ascribe to early subconscious complexes of the child what really are late and extraneously produced impressions.

Comic-book-inspired drawings show how imbued children have become with the special forms of sadism dwelt on in

comics, pictures of horror with glorified gangsters, with super-man types, with "mad scientists," with sexual confusion.

The finer analysis of children's drawings gives us important leads with respect to a child's development in two significant areas: his relation to authority, disturbance of which may lead to other disorders such as jealousy; and his capacity for male and female identification. It is in these two fundamental areas that comic books do a great deal of harm.

In addition to all the other methods, the most important one is to treat the child and observe what progress he makes. How can one understand a troubled child fully unless one has tried to help him? The establishment of a proper transfer relationship is essential. Pre-adolescents and adolescents, like other people, want to be appreciated. In the first place, one must take their side in their struggle for self-expression, for recognition, for emancipation. But at the same time one must give them guidance on the strength of one's authority of more experience and more knowledge. It is an error to do only the one without the other. By treating a child, or guiding him or educating him, one learns about him. And that alone clarifies the real diagnosis.

These are the main methods used in our investigation. One of our problems was to scrutinize how children read comic books. The purpose was to determine what goes on in the child when he reads them. The first question was, what is actually reflected in the child's mind, what picture of the world does he get from comic books? It is with comic books as with any life experience. Not the experience itself, as an observer records and evaluates it, but the way it is reflected and experienced by the person himself, is what counts and what explains the psychological results.

Just to learn what children retain from comic-book reading is enlightening for anybody who really wants to become acquainted with the question. A boy of seven and a half is studied at the Clinic because he was "bad in school" and day-dreams a lot. Previously psychiatrists at a public agency had

made the diagnosis of "schizophrenic tendencies." Getting on the subject of comics he says, "Sometimes I read a comic book ten times a day. I look at the pictures a long time. I just imagine as if they are real. They go around stabbing people. They have eight knives, and they rob a liquor store. They stab a woman with a knife. They stab two women with a knife. One man started killing people: five cops, six women and eighteen others. If anybody ever crossed him, he didn't give them no chance. This famous artist painted this picture and it was smuggled. Then it said the picture was torn up but then I found out it wasn't. Everybody got swindled. I like adventure." This boy was successfully treated and even steered to good literature. He has now been followed up by personal interview for six years. We could never discover any "schizophrenic tendencies," that convenient snap diagnosis for troubled children.

Such statements from children, which are or should be the raw material of any comic-book study, can be obtained only if you get the child's confidence and show him that you are interested in him. Often children talk at first about the policemen; but then when they warm up and get more confidence they talk about the ones they really admire and think about—the crooks. This preference does not come from any moral perversity, but results directly from the fact that the criminal is depicted as more glamorous and dominant.

By and large much younger children read crime comics than is commonly and conveniently assumed. Even children under six look at the pictures. Younger children do not see so many *new* comic books because the child of six or seven does not have so much money at his disposal as the child of ten or eleven.

Crime comic books are available almost anywhere. Any child who meets other children has access to them. They are in kindergartens, pediatric clinics, pediatric wards in the hospitals. They are in playgrounds and schools, at church functions and, of course, in the homes of the child or his friends. Again and

again I have found quantities of comic books in my own clinics, although I certainly did not want them there. Many children, owing to their life circumstances, are less able to resist this ingeniously contrived seduction to read more and more crime comics than are others. The question should not be so much why children get the habit as how are so many of them able to protect their integrity against them. Often there is a typical vicious circle: the comic books lead the child into temptation to commit delinquencies and stimulate him sexually. Then this is followed by fears and worries—as a result of which he reads even more comics to forget them.

During the first few years of our investigation it was easy to obtain information from children about which crime comics they prefer and how many they read. But since criticism of comics has spread and parents have begun to make some protests against them, children are apt to be on the defensive when asked about them. It has often happened that when I ask a child in the presence of his mother he replies promptly that the comics he prefers are "*Donald Duck*, animal comics and jokey books." But if I see this child alone on a subsequent occasion he corrects his previous statement, "What I *really* like are the murder ones!"—and he will go on to enumerate the usual list. So it is no longer so easy to obtain quickly accurate results.

What children expect and find in comic books is well illustrated by the case of a nine-year-old boy. He was excellently brought up in a cultured and intelligent home. He got twenty-five cents weekly for spending money and he nursed it very carefully. One day he turned up after school and said, "I just spent *three* cents today." He displayed with satisfaction a tabloid newspaper he had bought. "They had some marvelous pictures of that gangster up in the Bronx that killed the policeman. And they had a suicide!" His father asked, "Why did you buy that?" and was answered by the boy, proud of his discovery, "It's just as good as the comics—and costs much less!" Without realizing it, however, this small boy was a spendthrift;

comic books have many more murders and acts of violence than two for three cents. He also forgot to take into account what more experienced crime-comics readers know, and what was pointed out by a boy on the *New York Times* Youth Forum: "Comic books tell more than newspapers about the details, and show how the murders were committed."

How and why children stop reading comics, when they do, is as important a study as how they came to read them and how they keep it up. Any child psychiatrist will miss an avenue to the child's superego if he fails to let the child tell him why he gave it up. New influences come into his life, real reading may commence, sadistic fantasies may be outgrown. Many children give up crime-comics reading like a bad sexual habit.

I have frequently asked children who talked about the good and bad things in comic books to tell me what the worst is that they have seen. That is often very enlightening as to the child's psychology. Usually they have an ambivalent attitude about these "worst" things. They abhor them and yet have been fascinated by them. Usually they point out scenes of torture and/or murder. A thirteen-year-old boy told me once that he saw in a comic book a picture of gangsters tying two living men to their car and dragging them to death on their faces over a rough road. He could not remember which comic book it was in, but said it was one of the most popular ones.

At first I did not believe him and thought that this must be his own spinning-out of a cruel fantasy, perhaps stimulated by something similar. What he had told me about was one of the cruel, primitive, bloody rites which did exist in prehistoric times, but disappeared at the dawn of history. In Homer's *Iliad*, Achilles, after slaying Hector, ties the *dead* body to his chariot and triumphantly races around the city of Troy. Homer described with repugnance and pity the bloody rite of dragging a dead body behind a war chariot—repressing the earlier, still bloodier one of dragging a living captive to his death.

Could a popular comic book for children, I asked myself,

return to pre-Homeric savagery to stimulate children's fantasy to such barbaric cruelty?

Later the boy remembered that he had swapped this comic book along with other choice ones with another boy, and he brought it to me. Underneath the title a little enclosed inscription reads: "Every word is true!" Then comes the picture of a car that is speeding away. Two men are tied by their feet to the rear bumper and lie face down. One has his hands tied behind his back and the lower part of his face is dragging in the road. The other man's hands are not tied and his arms are stretched out. The text in the balloons indicates that three men in the car are talking:

"A couple more miles oughta do th' trick!"

"It better! These #-""*!! GRAVEL ROADS are tough on tires!"

"But ya gotta admit, there's nothing like 'em for ERASING FACES!"

Next to these balloons is a huge leering face, eyes wide and gloating and mouth showing upper and lower teeth in a big grin:

"SUPERB! Even Big Phil will admire this job—if he lives long enough to identify the MEAT!"

The boy who brought me the comic book explained to me that of course these men were still alive: "They may have been roughed up a little, but they are being killed by being dragged to death on their stomachs and faces." You can see that very plainly, he pointed out to me, from the carefully drawn fact that they both desperately try to hold up their heads—the one with outstretched hands still succeeding at it, the other still jerking his head up but now failing to do so enough to keep his face off the gravel road. "Corpses," my young expert explained, "couldn't do that."

Two years later this story was reprinted. This time the story was promoted from the middle of the book to first place, and the dragging-to-death illustration was the frontispiece.

IV

The Wrong Twist

The Effects of Comic Books on Children

“A man who gives a wrong twist to your mind, meddles with you just as truly as if he hit you in the eye; the mark may be less painful, but it’s more lasting.”

—Santayana

A typical comic-book drawing shows a blonde young girl lying in bed. She says: "Then I was dreaming, of murder and morphine." This is a crime-comic-book dream. Murder, crime and drug traffic are offered to children in a literature which the defenders of comic books call the modern version of the stories of the brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen or Mother Goose. But are there heroin addicts in Grimm, marihuana smokers in Andersen or dope peddlers in Mother Goose? And are there advertisements for guns and knives?

A counterpart to the girl who dreams about murder and morphine is the equally blonde girl in another comic book who muses over a cigarette: "I like to remember the past! . . . It was so wonderful!"

What was "so wonderful"? This girl was the young wife of a Nazi concentration-camp guard. You see him hit a half-nude prisoner with a truncheon while she says: "Hit him again, Franz! Make him bleed more! Hit him!"

Evidently the industry thinks that some children learn slowly, for the same scene is repeated in a close-up: "Hit him some more, Franz! Hit him! . . . Make him bleed more, Franz! Make him bleed!"

And later she says: "I like to remember the prisoners suffering, the beatings and the blood!"

In one of the pictures of this story there are three balloons with the exclamation "HEIL HITLER!" This comic book appeared at about the time when a group of fourteen- and fifteen-year-old boys had a "Nazi stormtrooper club" in which every prospective member had to hit a Negro on the head with a brick.

I undertook and continued the study of the effects of crime comics on the minds of children in the face of an extraordinary complacency on the part of adults. Typical of this attitude is the Committee on the Evaluation of Comic Books, which has existed now for several years. It uses methods which are amateurish and superficial and, from the point of view of the mental hygiene of children, its classification is most lenient and

unscientific. It divides comic books arbitrarily into four classes: a) no objection, b) some objection, c) objectionable, d) very objectionable. At one time the Committee reported that it found "only" thirty-nine comic books "very objectionable." This committee distinguishes fifteen categories of comic books, failing to realize that for most of them the harmful ingredients are the same, whatever the locale. Of "undesirable effects" the committee in question mentions only three: "bad dreams, fright, and general emotional upset." How they know that one comic book causes that and not another, and why they fail to mention the really serious harmful effects is not explained. No wonder that these evaluations lend themselves to gross misstatements in which those not rated "very objectionable" have been lumped together with other categories as if they were all right. What has made the committee's evaluations even more confusing to the public is the fact that the Children's Bureau of the Federal Security Agency has given its findings as the only statistics in an official statement about comic books.

Children's minds are at least as sensitive and vulnerable as a man's stomach. Supposing you divide eggs into such groups and say that to some you have "some objections," others you find "objectionable" and still others "very objectionable." You can grade good eggs. But what sense is there in grading bad eggs? Isn't a bad egg bad, especially if one child eats hundreds of them? Even with this questionable yardstick, this committee found at one time that almost half of the comic books were not "satisfactory." Imagine that your neighborhood grocer would sell you eggs for your children, almost half of which were bad!

This leniency toward what adults sell to children is in marked contrast to the severity of adults when children commit minor moral infractions. If a comic book is classified as "some objection" it is called satisfactory and "suitable for children." But let a child commit a delinquent or sexual act to which there is "some objection" and the enormous machinery of children's courts, police, social agencies, psychiatrists and child-guidance

people goes into action and the child is crushed. I have observed that many times.

The distinction of a greater from a lesser evil is an old one. But the committee inaugurated the practice of distinguishing between a greater, a medium and a lesser evil. The resultant confusion has done a lot of harm.

Some time ago the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene issued a press release. It spoke of "the much-maligned comic book" and said "the universal appeal of the comic book stems from its color, action and drama." Modern psychopathology, however, teaches that it is not the form but the content that is dynamically important. This release reminds one of the old story of the boy called into conference by his father to receive sexual enlightenment. After listening to a tedious discourse about the flowers, the birds and the bees for some time, the little boy interrupts his father impatiently, "And there is no intercourse at all?" So one might ask about crime comic books: And nobody gets shot? Or stabbed or tortured? And no girls are beaten or choked or almost raped?

Anyone wishing to study scientifically the psychological causes of human behavior must always be on guard against the error of assuming that something has causal significance just because it happened in the past. He must think in terms of psychological processes and developments which connect cause and effect. And he can hold a new factor responsible only if he has taken into account all other possible factors, physical, individual, psychological and social. On the other hand, he should not be deterred if the same factor affects different people differently and some people seemingly not at all.

Improper food deserves attention not only because it may cause indigestion, but also because it may cause totally different mild or serious manifestations of malnutrition. The mind is not something that grows by itself; it is nourished. Some nourishment is good, some is bad. Before one knew about vitamins one could not make the diagnosis of avitaminosis. The same

reasoning should apply to scientific psychiatry. In order to diagnose the operative cause of any disorder, two requirements are necessary: one must know the nature of the factor that may be a possible cause, and one must think of it when confronted with a case. That is the essence of clinical thinking.

A young mother came to see me about her ten-year-old son. "He has wild imaginations," she complained. "When he plays with the children on the block, all younger than he, he takes a knife and says, 'I'll take your eyes out!' He slashed a girl's doll carriage with the knife. I caught him with a three-year-old boy. He was saying to him, 'Now I must gouge your eyes out!' Then he said to the boy, 'I must hang you!' Then he said, 'I must rope you up!'"

What you read in the usual books of child psychiatry or child guidance, or in Freud's works, is just not adequate to explain such a case. This is a new kind of harm, a new kind of bacillus that the present-day child is exposed to.

This boy was an inveterate reader of comics. This fact came out accidentally when he saw comic books on my desk and asked me, "Doctor, why do *you* read comic books?"

"I read crime comics," he went on. "In some they tie up the girls. They tie their hands behind their backs because they want to do something to them later.

"Once I saw in a science comic where this beast comes from Mars. It showed a man's hand over his eyes and streams of blood coming down. I play a little rough with the kids sometimes. I don't mean to hurt them. In a game I said I would gouge a child's eyes out. I was playing that I was walking around and I jumped out at him. I scratched his face. Then I caught him and sucked the blood out of his throat. In another game I said, 'I'll scratch your eyes out!'"

In one of our later sessions this boy told me that younger children should not read comic books. "If I had a younger brother," he explained, "I wouldn't want *him* to read the horror comic books, like *Weird Science*, because he might get scared.

I don't think they should read *Captain Marvel*. Look at this one with all the pictures of the man without his head! The boy downstairs is six years old. Whenever he sees any monsters he always starts crying. He thinks it's real. It is bad for children because after they read that they keep on thinking about it. When they buy the comic books they start thinking all sorts of things, playing games. I played such games because I got them from the comic books. That's why I think younger children shouldn't have them."

To overlook the comic-book factor often means great unfairness to children—and of course to their parents, whom it is so easy to blame. Taking money away from younger children by threats or use of force is nowadays a frequent delinquency which often does not come to the attention of the authorities. A girl of eleven hit a six-year-old girl, pushed her and took her money out of her pocket. An official psychiatrist, after a routine examination, made the drastic and, under the circumstances, cruel recommendation that she be sent to a psychiatric hospital first, then be taken from home and placed in an institution. He wrote the usual cliché that she had "deep-seated problems" (which he did not specify) and remarked that she had "very little awareness of the consequences and implications of her action."

But on closer study we found that she had very definite ideas about these "consequences and implications." She and her friends were imbued with the superman ideology: the stronger dominates the smaller and weaker. She told us a comic-book story of a bank robbery which ends in a Superman rescue. She laughed because she knew that the bank robbery was real while the Superman rescue was not. The man-hating comic-book figure, Sheena, was her favorite. And no other vista of life except the ideal of being stronger than the next one was presented to her.

"I read more than ten comic books a day," she said. "There was a girl who stole in a department store and nobody saw her.

So she is going out of the store, so this man he grabbed her. When she got to her home she thought nobody was following her. Then they took her to the police station and said if she did it any more they'd have to put her away. That shows if you steal anything you never know who follows you or whoever is watching you. If she was more clever maybe it could have been different."

In other words, this girl was well aware of consequences and implications as demonstrated to children in comic books. The "consequences" are that you may be caught. The "implications" are that you should be clever and *not* get caught.

I have found the effect of comic books to be first of all anti-educational. They interfere with education in the larger sense. For a child, education is not merely a question of learning, but is a part of mental health. They do not "learn" only in school; they learn also during play, from entertainment and in social life with adults and with other children. To take large chunks of time out of a child's life—time during which he is not positively, that is, educationally, occupied—means to interfere with his healthful mental growth.

To make a sharp distinction between entertainment and learning is poor pedagogy, and even worse psychology. A great deal of learning comes in the form of entertainment, and a great deal of entertainment painlessly teaches important things. By no stretch of critical standards can the text in crime comics qualify as literature, or their drawings as art. Considering the enormous amount of time spent by children on crime comic books, their gain is nil. They do not learn how to read a serious book or magazine. They do not gain a true picture of the West from the "Westerns." They do not learn about any normal aspects of sex, love or life. I have known many adults who have treasured throughout their lives some of the books they read as children. I have never come across any adult nor adolescent who had outgrown comic-book reading who would ever dream of keeping any of these "books" for any sentimental or other

reason. In other words, children spend a large amount of their time and money on these publications and have nothing positive to show for it. And since almost all good children's reading has some educational value, crime comics by their very nature are not only non-educational; they are anti-educational. They fail to teach anything that might be useful to a child; they do suggest many things that are harmful.

Since murder is the mainstay of crime comics, you might expect—provided you think education about murder is educational—that children would learn something positive about that. They do not. Here is a typical statement made by a fourteen-year-old boy: “First degree is when you kill for no reason at all. Second degree is when you kill for a lame excuse—like when you think somebody talked about you. Third degree—you have a reason, but it still isn't very good. . . . Manslaughter is when you kill a person with a knife or any weapon except a gun.”

Where crime comics pay a hypocritical obeisance to educational demands they show their true colors even more clearly. For example, under the lame pretext of self-defense, they show pictures of “Vulnerable Areas” in the human body with such notations as:

EYES: finger jab or thumb gouge

BRIDGE OF NOSE: edge of hand blow

When I pointed out this anti-educational aspect of crime comics, the industry answered by inserting occasional educational pages of advertising for organizations advocating better schools or some health campaign. Some of the worst crime comics contain notices about the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, or mention in the stories the Damon Runyon Fund or the Red Cross. This, of course, does these organizations no good; but it camouflages the comics. So the characteristics of crime comic books might be summed up as violence in content, ugliness in form and deception in presentation.

The most subtle and pervading effect of crime comics on

children can be summarized in a single phrase: moral disarmament. I have studied this in children who do not commit overt acts of delinquency, who do not show any of the more conspicuous symptoms of emotional disorder and who may not have difficulty in school. The more subtle this influence is, the more detrimental it may be. It is an influence on character, on attitude, on the higher functions of social responsibility, on super-ego formation and on the intuitive feeling for right and wrong. To put it more concretely, it consists chiefly in a blunting of the finer feelings of conscience, of mercy, of sympathy for other people's suffering and of respect for women as women and not merely as sex objects to be bandied around or as luxury prizes to be fought over. Crime comics are such highly flavored fare that they affect children's taste for the finer influences of education, for art, for literature and for the decent and constructive relationships between human beings and especially between the sexes.

A boy of eleven who reads his own crime comics and his sister's love comics has this conception of girls: "In the love comics the girls have dresses and wearing apparel. The girls in the crime stories are always on the gangsters' side. The gangsters pick them up, like. They just roam around with the gangsters. They are always dressed up in new clothes; practically every day they buy new clothes. The dresses have a V-shape in the front. The girls are in the room. They do something bad or something, and then a man slaps them and beats them up."

When children confide in you, they will tell you that younger children should not read comic books. Here are notes of a typical dialogue with a boy of thirteen:

Q.: Why do you say that younger children shouldn't read them?

A.: Because.

Q.: Can't you explain it?

A.: No.

Q.: Tell me your reasons.

A.: It gives them ideas.

Q.: What kind of ideas?

A.: Things they shouldn't do.

Q.: But a very young child couldn't do these things that are in comic books anyhow.

A.: Maybe. But when they read these books they don't think right.

Q.: What do you mean by that?

A.: I mean they don't know what is right.

That is precisely the point. Psychiatrists in court cases often have to answer questions about a person's ability to distinguish right from wrong in an individual act or in general. And yet it is astonishing how little concrete and systematic work has been done on the ethical equilibrium of the person as a whole. We know that every person has in his brain a picture of his body, the so-called "body image." I believe that individuals also have a mental self-knowledge in a form that one may call an "ethical image." It is this that makes possible a stable and yet not rigid ethical equilibrium. Speaking of the mildest disorders of the personality, of adults or children, this "ethical image" which a person has of himself unconsciously is a cornerstone of mental health.

Discussion of ethics is not popular in psychiatric and psychoanalytic literature. It smacks too much of a moralistic attitude and a lack of the objectivity of natural science. It is true that in a society like our own in which ethical norms are undergoing great changes, the psychiatrist or psychoanalyst inevitably introduces a personal, socially conditioned factor in this sphere. But that does not prevent his patient from having ethical problems. Many if not all sexual conflicts, for example, are fundamentally ethical difficulties. Such an acknowledgment may of course open the door to obscurantism and bigotry, but there is no reason why it should not also open the way to a socially oriented science.

Clinical psychiatrists used to pay very little attention to the

examination of ethical feelings or ethical judgment. A new departure was the "Fernald Method." This Ethical Discrimination Test consisted of rating ten misdeeds, such as throwing hot water on a cat or taking apples from another man's orchard, in the order of their gravity. The idea was to measure a supposed natural moral attitude independent of general intelligence, judgment and other mental faculties, and also independent of the environment. Both the method and these general assumptions have proved too primitive. But Fernald did achieve an extension of the previously more restricted schemes of personality examination. It was found that the results of his test are not so significant in themselves, but often led the person tested to fuller statements about his ethical and social views which are revealing for the psychiatric estimate of his personality.

This line of inquiry was later considered too old-fashioned and has been much neglected. I have found that in modified form, more adjusted to the individual's special life circumstances, his ethical judgment in comparing two or several acts can be used almost as a projective test.

The greatest impetus to the study of the ethical aspects of behavior came of course from psychoanalysis, especially from Freud's discovery of the influence of unconscious guilt feelings. But conservative psychoanalysis has not progressed much further. It seems to regard the glib distinction between normal feelings of guilt and neurotic feelings of guilt as the solution of a question, when actually it is merely the statement of the question. And it got into real logical complications when it attempted to regard the tendencies to aggression from a purely biological point of view. In reality the whole significance of aggressive attitudes for the organism becomes of less and less significance with social progress. If we carry out experiments on the brains of cats, aggression is a biological problem. If we study the minds of children it is preponderantly a social and ethical problem.

The cultural background of millions of American children

comes from the teaching of the home, the teaching of the school (and church), the teaching of the street and from crime comic books. For many children the last is the most exciting. It arouses their interest, their mental participation, their passions and their sympathies, but almost entirely in the wrong direction. The atmosphere of crime comic books is unparalleled in the history of children's literature of any time or any nation. It is a distillation of viciousness. The world of the comic book is the world of the strong, the ruthless, the bluffer, the shrewd deceiver, the torturer and the thief. All the emphasis is on exploits where somebody takes advantage of somebody else, violently, sexually or threateningly. It is no more the world of braves and squaws, but one of punks and molls. Force and violence in any conceivable form are romanticized. Constructive and creative forces in children are channeled by comic books into destructive avenues. Trust, loyalty, confidence, solidarity, sympathy, charity, compassion are ridiculed. Hostility and hate set the pace of almost every story. A natural scientist who had looked over comic books expressed this to me tersely, "In comic books life is worth nothing; there is no dignity of a human being."

Children seek a figure to emulate and follow. Crime comic books undermine this necessary ingredient of ethical development. They play up the good times had by those who do the wrong thing. Those who at the tail end of stories mete out punishment use the same violence and the same lingo as those whom they punish. Since everybody is selfish and force and violence are depicted as the most successful methods, the child is given a feeling of justification. They not only suggest the satisfaction of primitive impulses but supply the rationalization. In this soil children indulge in the stock fantasies supplied by the industry: murder, torture, burglary, threats, arson and rape. Into that area of the child's mind where right and wrong is evaluated, children incorporate such false standards that an ethical confusion results for which they are not to blame. They

become emotionally handicapped and culturally underprivileged. And this affects their social balance.

Whatever may give a child some ethical orientation is dragged down to the crime-violence level. Inculcation of a distorted morality by endless repetition is not such an intangible factor if one studies its source in comic books and its effect in the lives of children. It is of course a question not of pious slogans like "Crime never pays" but of the emotional accents within the stories themselves.

In one comic an old man is killed during the hold-up of his jewelry store. He had not obeyed the order to back up against the wall quickly enough. After other crimes and murders the captured criminal says: "It was not right to kill him. . . . That man couldn't have obeyed me! . . . That old man was **STONE DEAF!**"

The moral principle is clear. If you hold up a man and he does not obey quickly enough because he is deaf, you are not supposed to shoot him. But if he is *not* deaf, shooting him is all right.

In one comic story called "Mother Knows Best," the mother advises her children: "I brought you kids up right—rub out those coppers like I taught you!"

One son answers: "Don't worry, ma! We'll give those flatfeet a bellyful of lead!"

Several boys have shown me this story. They themselves condemned and at the same time were fascinated by this anti-maternal story.

In the same comic book, a man attacks a high school girl ("All I want is a little kiss! C'mon!") and chokes her to death.

What in a few words is the essential ethical teaching of crime comics for children? I find it well and accurately summarized in this brief quotation:

It is not a question of right, but of winning. Close your heart against compassion. Brutality does it. The stronger

is in the right. Greatest hardness. Follow your opponent till he is crushed.

These words were the instructions given on August 22, 1939, by a superman in his home in Berchtesgaden to his generals, to serve as guiding lines for the treatment of the population in the impending war on Poland.

In modification of the Fernald method of letting children judge the severity of offenses, I have often asked them about punishment. Why do people get punished, what is just punishment, how does it come about that people get punished? Frequently the reply is that it serves the criminal right, whatever the punishment may be: "He got caught, didn't he?" My clinical findings leave no room for doubt that children learn from crime comics that the real guilt is getting caught. They have little faith in any ordinary public processes of having an offense evaluated and justly and humanely dealt with. The law enforcers are criminals in reverse. They use the same methods. If they are also stronger and there are more of them, they win; if not, they lose. In many subtle and not so subtle forms the lynch spirit is taught as a moral lesson. Many children have told me that lynching is all right and have shown me examples from their comic books. In one such story the townspeople get together, hunt the criminal and he is finally shot and killed. The lesson is in the last sentence: "The story of Lee Gillon proves that fearless people banded together will always see that justice triumphs."

In the same book, a man slaps a girl's face and says: "Give me trouble and you'll have a board full of spikes smashed into your kisser!"

The form in which this distrust for democratic law and the morality of taking punishment—or rather vengeance—into one's own hands has done most harm to the ethical development of young people is the superman conceit. Analyzing children's fantasies and daydreams, I have often found in them a wish for

overwhelming physical strength, domination, power, ruthlessness, emancipation from the morals of the community. It may show in various half-repressed ways or openly as admiration for these traits. Spontaneously children connect this with crime comic books of the Superman, Batman, Superboy, Wonder Woman type. In the individual case this superman ideology is psychologically most unhygienic. The would-be supermen compensate for some kind of inferiority, real or imagined, by the fantasy of the superior being who is a law unto himself. I have had cases where children would have had a good chance to overcome feelings of inferiority in constructive ways at their disposal if they had not been sidetracked by the fancied shortcuts of superman prowess.

The superman conceit gives boys and girls the feeling that ruthless go-getting based on physical strength or the power of weapons or machines is the desirable way to behave. When I have had to examine young adults at the Clinic off and on for driving recklessly, I was interested to find the same attitude. Particularly dangerous is the superman-speed-fancy in girls who in turn influence boys. One young girl told me that she would only go out with boys who would not let other cars pass them on the road. That was the idea of the proper male behavior that she had got from comics.

In these children there is an exact parallel to the blunting of sensibilities in the direction of cruelty that has characterized a whole generation of central European youth fed on the Nietzsche-Nazi myth of the exceptional man who is beyond good and evil. It is an ethical confusion. If such persons are analyzed psychiatrically, it is found that the trouble lies not so much with the impulse to do the wrong thing as with the false rationalization which permits the impulse to grow and to express itself in deeds. The very children for whose unruly behavior I would want to prescribe psychotherapy in an anti-superman direction, have been nourished (or rather poisoned) by the endless repetition of Superman stories. How can they respect the hard-work-

ing mother, father or teacher who is so pedestrian, trying to teach common rules of conduct, wanting you to keep your feet on the ground and unable even figuratively speaking to fly through the air? Psychologically Superman undermines the authority and the dignity of the ordinary man and woman in the minds of children.

When I described how children suffer in their ethical development through the reading of comic books, the industry countered by pointing with pride to the "moral" lesson imprinted on many crime comics, that "crime does not pay." In the first place, this is not true. In comic books crime usually does pay, and pay very well, until the last picture or two. The crimes are glamorous; the end is dull. Frequently the ratio of "crime" to "does not pay" is as high as fifty to one. More important, the slogan "Crime does not pay" is *not* moral, but highly immoral. It is strange how responsible adults have accepted this slogan and refer to it on platforms, over the radio and in articles as admirable. Great harm has been done by teaching children that they should not play hookey, that they should not steal or lie, that they should not hit girls (as comic-book figures so often do)—*because it "doesn't pay"*! I have seen many children who were confused by this vicious crime-comic-book morality. The reason why one does not hit girls, even if comics have made it so attractive, is that it is cowardly and that it hurts them; the reason why one does not steal or break into stores is that that is not how one lives in a civilized community; that whether crime pays or does not pay, it is not what a decent person wants to do. *That* should be the lesson for children.

When I pointed out the hypocrisy of the "Crime does not pay" slogan and its bad effect on children, the industry accused me of "unfairness" in attacking their highest endeavors and introduced some more slogan morality. In one comic book are two pages by a police captain attacking me: "Don't let reformers kid you!" He is "shocked by what I read today about the people who condemn crime comics. These people are the

menace.” He goes on: “Children don’t like to be kicked around by reformers who want to decide what’s good for them to read.” And he extols “the strong moral force” that comics exert on children.

Frequently I have been in the position of having to defend children who have received harsh judgments in courts and on psychiatric wards and equally harsh treatment in places of detention and reformatories. There is no better illustration of the state of affairs where we first victimize children and then put all the responsibility on them, the victims, than this same comic book. It has a story where two policemen are killed—and a real police captain pointing out what a “strong moral force” such a book is!

In the midst of bloody scenes in another book are two full-page announcements, one advocating “better schools” and the other with an oversized headline in capitals: “WITH GOD ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE!” advocating “a new way of prayer.” If one tried to set out deliberately to create ethical confusion in children, better ways could hardly be devised. No wonder that a minister heard his young son exclaim: “Hands up, in the name of the Lord!”

The detrimental effect on character is if anything worse on girls than on boys. Their ego-ideal formation is interfered with by the fascination of the sadistic female comic-book heroines. Comic books do not permit these children even in their imagination to view a non-violent life. A girl of eleven examined because of stealing showed in her Thematic Apperception Test a profusion of stories with murder and hostility. Her drawing of a woman showed a masculine type with violent aggressivity. Of average intelligence, she had a reading retardation undoubtedly caused by constant reading of comics. She had incorporated the comic-book morale into her character.

“I read about ten a day,” she stated. “I like the stories when you get in trouble and everything. You learn like it does not pay if you kill a person for nothing that isn’t right[!]. They

have to go to prison for a certain length of time, then they come out and do it all over again. Then they go up the river again."

Without rationalization and without an ideal image of oneself one cannot learn to exert self-discipline. That is why good reading is such a character-building influence. Comic books work in the opposite direction. A thirteen-year-old girl examined because of "truancy and disobedience" said about her reading, "I used to buy a love comic every day. I like to read *Sheena* because I like the way she fights. She fights like a man, swings on the vines and kicks people in the face."

Ethical development of children, so intimately bound up with their mental development, has to do not only with relations with an individual but also with integration in groups. The development of the superego, of conscience or, more simply, the sense of decency, takes place not only on the basis of identification with parents but also with successive parent-substitutes who are at the same time representatives and symbols of group demands and group responsibilities. In this sphere, comic books are most pernicious. They expose children's minds to an endless stream of prejudice-producing images. This influence, subtle and pervasive but easily demonstrable by clinical psychological methods, has not only directly affected the individual child, but also constitutes an important factor for the whole nation. It is currently fashionable to speak of "inter-group tensions," "group adjustments" and so on. The old term *race hatred* (or *race prejudice*) is more honest and more to the point. What we call "minorities" constitute the *majority* of mankind. The United States is spending at present millions of dollars to persuade the world on the air and by other propaganda means that race hatred is not an integral part of American life. At the same time, millions of American comic books are exported all over the world which give the impression that the United States is instilling race hatred in young children.

If I were to make the briefest summary of what children have told us about how different peoples are represented to them in the lore of crime comics, it would be that there are two kinds of people: on the one hand is the tall, blond, regular-featured man sometimes disguised as a superman (or superman disguised as a man) and the pretty young blonde girl with the super-breast. On the other hand are the inferior people: natives, primitives, savages, "ape men," Negroes, Jews, Indians, Italians, Slavs, Chinese and Japanese, immigrants of every description, people with irregular features, swarthy skins, physical deformities, Oriental features. In some crime comics the first class sometimes wears some kind of superman uniform, while the second class is in mufti. The brunt of this imputed inferiority in whole groups of people is directed against colored people and "foreign born."

When the seeds of prejudice against others first appear in a child, or when he first becomes aware of belonging to a group against which there is prejudice, depends on many diverse factors: family, education, community, social stratum. From my studies, the second apparently appears later. But in general both feelings appear much earlier than is commonly supposed. A four-year-old can imbibe prejudice from comic books, and six- or seven-year-olds are quite articulate about it. Sometimes their feeling of dislike for a group ("They are bad." "They are vicious." "They are criminals." "They are dirty." "You can't trust them.") is derived from crime comic books. In other cases, distorted stereotypes acquired at home, on the street, in school, are given new nourishment and perpetuation by comic-book reading. These conclusions are based entirely on *what the children themselves say*.

The pictures of these "inferior" types as criminals, gangsters, rapers, suitable victims for slaughter by either the lawless or the law, have made an indelible impression on children's minds. There can be no doubt about the correctness of this conclusion.

For example, when a child is shown a comic book that he has not read and is asked to pick out the bad man, he will unhesitatingly pick out types according to the stereotyped conceptions of race prejudice, and tell you the reason for his choice. "Is he an American?" "No!"

Attacks by older children on younger ones, inspired or fortified by the race prejudice shown in comic books, are getting more frequent. I have seen such cases (which do not always come to the attention of the authorities) with victims belonging to various minorities. For the victims, this is frequently a serious traumatic emotional episode. Some juvenile gangs make it a practice to beat dark-skinned children, and they do it with comic-book brutality. So comic books provide both the methods and the vilification of the victims.

Comic books read with glee by many children, including very young ones, teach the props of anti-Semitism. There is the book with the story of the "itch-ray projector," with illustrations which might be taken directly from Nazi magazines like Streicher's *Stuermer*. One particularly popular comic book features the story of "Mother Mandelbaum, A True Story." Depicted as an unmistakable and repellent stereotype, she "aspires to be the biggest fence in New York." She finances bank robberies, starts a school for pickpockets, and also has a class for safecrackers and another to teach assorted kinds of violence. She personally orders and supervises the beating up of "slow payers."

When you see groups of children reading this and hear them chuckle and fill in the derogatory epithets and appellations, the result of the indoctrination is clear. It partially explains some recent episodes of vandalism and attacks on children.

As for counteracting prejudice, which some publishers claim to achieve through their heroes-who-fly-through-the-air, we have yet to see a single child who was even remotely influenced in this way by a comic book. Even the comic-book version of

Uncle Tom's Cabin has been characterized by a pupil in a school magazine like this:

The Classics Comics version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* gives the impression that the Negro is still that stereotyped man who sings about "going to glory" all day. Mrs. Stowe's book shows the Negro to be a human being.

Some children take for granted these comics standards about races, with more or less awareness of their implications. For others they constitute a serious traumatic experience. For example, a twelve-year-old colored girl said at the Lafargue Clinic: "I read a lot of comic books, sometimes about seven or eight a day. *Love Comics*, and *Wonder Woman*, *Sheena*, *Superman*, *Archie*. I don't like the jungle. She don't have no peace. Every time she turn around, she'd be fighting. I don't think they make the colored people right. The way they make them I never seen before—their hair and big nose and the English they use. They never have an English like we have. They put them so dark—for real I've never seen anybody before like that. White kids would think all colored people look like that, and really they aren't. Some of those children in my school don't like no white people. One girl's face was scratched up. I seen the girl, but not the fight."

The depiction of racial stereotypes in sadistic actions makes a great impression on children. It is not difficult to find out why that is so if one bothers to analyze children's psychological processes in this sphere. One effect of this fomenting of race hatred is the fact that in many children's minds mankind is divided into two groups: regular men who have the right to live, and submen who deserve to be killed. But the deeper psychological effects are more subtle. A comic book has a picture of a white girl held with her arms seized from behind by a dark-skinned man. A picture like this stands out in a child's mind quite independent of the story. The picture alone becomes the starting point for fantasy. Its sexual effect has been built up

by previous pictures showing her, front and back. There is another story showing a subhuman caveman grabbing a blonde heroine.

We know that the dreams of adults often contain images of forbidden acts in which one of the participants belongs to a group of people considered socially inferior by the dreamer. In this way the forbidden act itself can break through the psychic censorship. Through such psychological mechanisms comic books give children a feeling of justification for violence and sadism, frequently in fantasy and sometimes in acts. They supply a rationalization for these primitive impulses. A large part of the violence and sadism in comic books is practiced by individuals or on individuals who are depicted as inferior, sub-human beings. In this way children can indulge in fantasies of violence as something permissible.

In many comic books dark-skinned people are depicted in rapelike situations with white girls. One picture, showing a girl nailed by her wrists to trees with blood flowing from the wounds, might be taken straight from an illustrated edition of the Marquis de Sade.

In another specimen the editorial viciousness is carried to the extreme of showing a white girl being overpowered by dark-skinned people who have tails. In another comic book the hero throws bombs and a Negro from his airplane. A picture shows the bombs and the Negro in mid-air while the hero calls out: "BOMBS AND BUMS AWAY!"

One of the most significant and deeply resented manifestations of race prejudice in the mores of the United States is the fact that in books, movies and magazines photographs of white women with bared breasts are taboo, while the same pictures of colored girls are permitted. Comic books for children make this same distinction. One such specimen had half-nude girls in all kinds of suggestive positions. Other pictures show typical whipping and flagellation scenes such as are found, outside of this children's literature, only in pornographic books.

When the girls are white, there is always some covering of the breasts. Only colored girls have their breasts fully exposed.

This is a demonstration of race prejudice for children, driven home by the appeal to sexual instincts. It is probably one of the most sinister methods of suggesting that races are fundamentally different with regard to moral values, and that one is inferior to the other. This is where a psychiatric question becomes a social one.

War comics, in which war is just another setting for comic-book violence, are widely read by soldiers at the front and by children at home. It seems dubious whether this is good for the morale of soldiers; it certainly is not good for the morality of children. Against the background of regular-featured blonde Americans, the people of Asia are depicted in comic books as cruelly grimacing and toothy creatures, often of an unnatural yellow color.

False stereotypes of race prejudice exist also in the "love comics." Children can usually pick the unsatisfactory lover just by his looks.

In addition to their effect on children's ethical growth, their character development and their social maturation, comic books are a factor in a host of negative behavior manifestations: dreams and daydreams; games; nightmares; general attitudes; reactions to women, to teachers, to younger children; and so on.

Comic books act clearly as a trauma or the precipitating circumstance in nightmares and other sleep disorders. I have observed this in many cases. Nightmares occur in children under very different circumstances, of course. Often they are more or less harmless; sometimes they are premonitory signs of more serious developments. A seven-and-a-half-year-old boy was brought to the clinic with a complaint of nightmares. He told his parents he could not remember what had frightened him. Psychological examinations had uncovered nothing. Later, routine questions about comic books elicited merely that he read *Donald Duck* and *Mickey Mouse* and liked them. When I saw

him alone I told him a little about what nightmares are, and that grownups have them too. And that if one remembers what they are about one has more chance not to have them any more.

"Don't you remember the least little bit of any of them?" I asked him.

"You know," the boy said, "what I really like is the *Blue Beetle* [a figure in a very violent crime comic book]. I read that many times. That's what I dreamed about. I don't have it at home; I get it at another boy's house."

"Who is the Blue Beetle?"

"He is like Superman. He is a beetle, but he changes into Superman and afterwards he changes into a beetle again. When he's Superman he knocks them out. Superman knocks them out with his fist. They fall down on the floor."

"If you say it is like Superman, how do you know it is?"

"I read the Superman stories. He catches them. Superman knocks the guys out."

It is not difficult to understand that a child stimulated to fantasies about violent and sadistic adventures and about a man who changes into an insect gets frightened. Kafka for the kiddies!

The recent output of horror comic books, a refined or rather debased form of crime comics, is especially apt to interfere with children's sleep. In a typical specimen a man-eating shark changes into a girl. You are shown the gruesome picture of an arm bitten off by the shark with blood flowing from the severed stump. And the moral ending?

"No one would ever believe . . . that the ghost of a lovely girl could inhabit a shark's body . . ."

All kinds of monstrous creatures inhabit these comic books. They have in common that their chief pastime seems to be to kill people, eat them or drink their blood. A boy of eight read many comics during the day without any ill effect being apparent to his family. But after a while he demanded that after dark his comic books be securely locked away. He insisted on

this every night because, he said, "I am afraid that these horrible creatures would come out and attack me in the night."

A common clinical syndrome in comic-book readers is rough and blustering conduct during the day, associated with fear dreams at night.

Sleep disorders also occur of course in children who say they do not read comics, though they know what is in them. Sometimes this is their method of telling you that they read those books, too, but either feel spontaneously guilty about it or know that their parents do not want them to do it. A girl of eight had been taken by her mother to the family physician because her sleep was disturbed. The physician had prescribed a sedative, but that had not helped the situation.

When I was alone with the girl, without her mother, she said, "Sometimes I dream that something happens to me. I read comic books, but only funny ones, not mystery ones. Some of my friends read mystery ones." When I asked her what "mystery ones" are, she answered eagerly, "When somebody shoots somebody! Sometimes they try to shoot the hero and they shoot people who have money when they want their money. They shoot anybody they want to. Sometimes there are girls in the mystery comic books. The girls, sometimes they shoot and sometimes they get shot. Sometimes the girls have a lot of money. They are dressed in pretty clothes, fancy clothes, diamonds, sequins, pearls. Sometimes a lady works with a killer and when the lady is going to tell the police, the men will shoot her. Sometimes they do bad things to girls. Sometimes they shoot them, sometimes they strangle them. I don't know what they do, I don't read those comic books." In the ordinary statistics based on the primitive questionnaire method such a girl would appear as reading only harmless funny animal comics, and the sleep disorder would be ascribed to some other cause.

The time when children read comics has something to do with the causation of sleep disorders. Many children read them

before they go to sleep, often unknown to their parents, until very late.

Some typical attitudes in children, particularly pre-adolescent children, are caused, stimulated, encouraged or rationalized by comic-book reading. For example, there is a kind of arrogance and bravado sometimes combined with a tendency to cruelty or to deceit and trickery. Such attitudes are by no means always either fixed personality traits or deeply ingrained characteristics caused by early childhood experiences, or the natural expressions of an abnormal temperament. I have often found that such attitudes, however serious they may seem, may be merely a façade, the psychological structure of which cannot be understood without a full knowledge of the mass seduction by comic books.

An important aid in understanding these attitudes and their relation to comic books is our finding that frequently the influence of comic books is not exerted directly, but comes through other children. The influence of children on children is generally underestimated. Parents have sometimes told me that what I have said about comic books may be true, but that doesn't affect *their* children because they do not read such trash. One of my answers to this is generally, "Don't you think your child will later on, either in school or in other places, meet other children who *have* been steeped in comics and have absorbed their attitudes concerning sex, violence, women, money, races and other subjects that make up social life?"

In many cases where there is no question of a definite neurosis or of serious delinquency, comic books have exerted a tangible and harmful influence. This always takes place, of course, in the setting of other factors. It should be self-understood that the effect of a stimulus—any stimulus—on a child's life is not so simple as the impact of one billiard ball against another. A child's life, unlike a billiard ball, stores many memories and the game of life is not played on a smooth, green, level surface.

An attitude which I have found most frequently engendered by crime comics is an attitude of brutality. Of course that is sometimes connected with sadism, with sado-masochistic tendencies, with cruelty, with sex, with hostility and aggressiveness. But we may not be seeing the forest for the trees if we start right off analyzing brutality into its supposed components. Nor does it help to say that children have always been cruel—with the implication that they always will be cruel and that cruelty has no cause, but is a natural attribute of children.

Many children are so sheltered that they have not come into contact with real brutality. They learn it from comic books. Many others have had some contact with brutality, but not to a comic-book degree. If they have a revulsion against it, crime comics turn this revulsion into indifference. If they have a subconscious liking for it, comic books will reinforce it, give it form by teaching appropriate methods and furnish the rationalization that it is what every "big shot" does.

The variety of different kinds of brutality described and depicted in detail is enormous. Children have told me graphically about daydreams induced by them. Brutality in fantasy creates brutality in fact. Children's games have become more brutal in recent years and there is no doubt that one factor involved in this is the brutalizing effect of children's comics.

An eight-year-old boy was examined and treated because he "wakes up at night scared." His Rorschach Test showed that he was "concerned with Superman kind of things and with supernatural things. A good bit of blood in the pictures." "The kids around the block," he told us, "have millions of comic books. In school there is a gang, they are littler than me. Once I was walking to school. They sneaked behind me and they held my hands behind my back. Once the whole gang knocked a girl's head against the wall. They jabbed a needle into her lip. They kept jabbing it in. Once a boy played sticking a penknife into my back."

A Lafargue social worker investigated the case of an eleven-

year-old boy who "played" with a boy several years younger. He put a rope around his neck, drawing it so tight that his neck became swollen, and the little boy almost strangled. His father happened to catch them and was able to prevent the incident from turning into a catastrophe. About a month later the eleven-year-old beat the younger child so that his mouth was all bloody. He did not know that one should not hit a younger and smaller boy. What he did know was that this sort of thing was done in innumerable comic-book stories about murders and robberies.

Realistic games about torture, unknown fifteen years ago, are now common among children. To indicate the blood which they see so often in crime comics they use catchup or lipstick. A boy of four and a girl of five were playing with a three-year-old boy. With a vicious look on her face the girl took hold of the younger boy and said, "Let's torture him!" Then she pushed him against the wall and marked him up with lipstick and said, "That is all blood!" One must know children's games to understand their minds, and one must know comic books to understand the games.

Violent games may be harmless enough, but only a hairline divides them from the acts of petty vandalism and destructiveness which have so increased in recent years. Camp counsellors have told me that with regard to some particularly destructive and ingenious schemes the inspiration came directly from comic books brought to the camp in plentiful numbers by the parents on Sundays.

The act most characteristic of the brutal attitude portrayed by comic books is to smack a girl in the face with your hand. Whatever else may happen, afterwards, no man is ever blamed for this. On the contrary, such behavior is glamorized as big-shot stuff in the context, and enhances the strength and prestige of the boy or man who does it.

In a comic book "Authorized by the Association of Comics Magazine Publishers" this lesson is driven home. A young girl

is being initiated as a confederate into the slot-machine protection racket. She sees how her friend beats up an old man, knocks off his glasses, etc. At first she does not like it. But later, after she had seen such brutal treatment repeated as routine in the racket, she says: "One gets accustomed to brutality after a while!" That is one instance where I agree with a comic-book character.

In another comic book the murderer says to his victim: "I think I'll give it to yuh in the belly! Yuh get more time to enjoy it!"

Is shooting in the stomach to inflict more pain really a natural tendency of children?

Often the ending of the stories, which is generally supposed to be moral, is an orgy of brutality like this ending of a horror comic-book story: "His body was torn to shreds, his face an unrecognizable mass of bloody and clawed flesh!"

In many comics stories there is nothing *but* violence. It is violence for violence's sake. The plot: killing. The motive: to kill. The characterization: killer. The end: killed. In one comic book the scientist ("mad," of course), Dr. Simon Lorch, after experimenting on himself with an elixir, has the instinct to "kill and kill again." He "flails" to death two young men whom he sees changing a tire on the road. He murders two boys he finds out camping. And so on for a week. Finally he is killed himself.

The injury-to-the-eye motif is an outstanding example of the brutal attitude cultivated in comic books—the threat or actual infliction of injury to the eyes of a victim, male or female. This detail, occurring in uncounted instances, shows perhaps the true color of crime comics better than anything else. It has no counterpart in any other literature of the world, for children or for adults.

According to our case material the brutalizing effect of this injury-to-the-eye motif is twofold. In the first place, it causes a blunting of the general sensibility. Children feel in a vague

subconscious way that if this kind of thing is permitted then other acts are so much less serious that it cannot be so wrong to indulge in them either.

An eight-year-old girl said to her mother, "Let's play a game. Someone is coming to see us. I'll stamp on him, knock his eyes out and cut him up."

But it has also a direct effect. Children have done deliberate harm to the eyes of other children, an occurrence which before the advent of crime comics I had never encountered among the thousands of children I examined. On a number of occasions I have asked juveniles who used homemade zip guns what harm they could do with so little power. I received prompt reply: "You shoot in the eye. Then it works."

The children of the early forties pointed out the injury-to-the-eye to us as something horrible. The children of 1954 take it for granted. A generation is being desensitized by these literal horror images.

One comic shows a man slashing another man across the eyeballs with a sword. The victim: "MY EYES! I cannot see!"

In a run-of-the-mill crime comic a man with brass knuckles hits another man (held fast by a third man) in the eyes, one after the other. Dialogue: "Now his *other* glimmer, Pete! Only sort of *twist* the knuckles this time!"

In a Western comic book the "Gouger" is threatening the hero's eye with his thumb, which has a very long and pointed nail. This is called the "killer's manicure." He says: "YORE EYES ARE GONNA POP LIKE GRAPES WHEN OL' GOUGER GETS HIS HANDS ON YOU! . . . HERE GO THE PEEPERS!"

In one comic book a gangster gains control over another man's racket and tapes his eyes "with gauze that has been smeared with an infectious substance!" He says: "When I get through with ya, ya'll never look at another case of beer again!"

When a policeman is blinded, the criminal says: "Well, he don't have to worry about them eyes no more!"

Girls are frequent victims of the eye motif, as in the typical: "My eyes! My eyes! Don't! PLEASE! I'll tell you anything you want to know, only don't blind me! PLEASE!"

It is a pity that such quotes are never mentioned in discussions by the expert defenders of comic books who "have never seen a child adversely affected by a comic book."

One of the best avenues to the unguarded minds of children, as of adults, is the study of their dreams. Investigation of children's dreams, especially in relation to various maladjustments and delinquencies, has been greatly neglected. From many years of study one definite statement can be made in connection with the eye motif. In children's dreams eyes often play a role, just as with adults. But injuries to the eye and gouging out of eyes in dreams used to be of extreme rarity. Even where it existed in nightmare dreams, it occurred in disguised form. Nowadays after years of comic-book indoctrination, such dreams in children or young people are not so rare.

There is an interplay between the stimuli from comic books and from life. A twelve-year-old girl was referred to the Clinic. She told us:

"Me and some girls and boys were playing. A boy said he was going to hit me in the eye. He did it with an umbrella-spoke."

Her mother confirmed this. One might expect—if one did not know the comic-book atmosphere in which American children grow up—that such a child might shy away from violence. But she told me she liked to look at killing, especially "how men kill ladies."

In such a case it is hard to say where the tendency to female sado-masochism comes from—from the violent play in the streets or from crime comic books or from the temper of the times which breeds both and affects individual lives so deeply and so early.

In children who read a lot of comic books there is a typical *comic-book syndrome*. It has these features:

- 1) The child feels spontaneously guilty about reading the violent, sadistic and criminal stories, and about fantasies stimulated by them.
- 2) He is made to feel guilty about them by others.
- 3) He reads them surreptitiously.
- 4) He lies and says he does not read crime comics, but only "Walt Disney comics, *Looney Tunes* and *Merry Melody* comics." Typical is the remark of an eight-year-old child at the end of our interview: "Please don't tell my mother that I read *Crime Does Not Pay* and *Superman!* I keep them always on the bottom of the heap."
- 5) He buys comic books with money which he is supposed to use for something else, or he steals to get comic-book money.

This comic-book syndrome occurs in children in all walks of life who are in no way psychologically predisposed. Of course in children in bad social circumstances it is apt to occur more frequently. Child psychologists who do not know that these children read crime comic books secretly and who do not gain a child's confidence fully cannot diagnose it.

Since comic books may have such diverse effects on children, from distortion of human values to nightmares and violent games, one must make clear to oneself what psychological mechanisms are involved. The influence consists in a continuation or repetition of the contents of the stories in life, either in thought or in action. The simplest mechanism is just plain imitation.

This factor of copying in action a detail from a comic book has been brought home by the cases where children hanged themselves.

It is in the youngest children that one can see the process of imitation most clearly at work. A four-year-old boy in Florida looked through his brother's comic books and his mother found him under a tree stark naked, with a long knife in his hands.

Stunned, she asked him why he had undressed himself, and what he was doing. He replied, "The man in the comics did it." Later he showed her pictures where some "Mongols" had a white man stripped naked and one of them had a long knife to cut out the American's tongue.

In California a very handsome six-year-old boy on his way home from school one day trudged to the top of a steep cliff. An ardent comic-book reader, he had translated his reading into practice and made for himself a flying cape or magic cloak. Taking a brisk run he jumped off the cliff to fly as his comic-book heroes did. Seriously injured, he told his mother, "Mama, I almost did fly!" A few days later he died from the injuries he had received.

How the comic-book defenders can deny the role of imitation in good faith is hard to see. During one of the debates in the British House of Commons, where the defense of English children against American comics was discussed, one member, a former judge, mentioned a case he had tried. Some juveniles had attacked another child on Hampstead Heath in London. He summed up his opinion: "Their crime was in fact imitative. They had seen the glorification of violence as illustrated in these comics; they had seen how the heroes used the rope, the dagger, the knife and the gun; they had seen how they were glorified, and they simply imitated the example of the heroes portrayed in these lurid publications."

Sometimes it is contended that imitation is far too simple a mechanism to explain anything in the behavior of children. Does not modern psychology know much more now about the complex behavior of human beings, about unconscious factors, infantile experiences and similar factors? This argument is pseudoerudite and utterly false. A similar misunderstanding is sometimes found in popular writings about modern physics. It is true that the general theory of relativity embraces complex happenings in the physical world. But that does not mean that for innumerable simple happenings the laws of gravitation are

not adequate. If an apple falls from a table, Newton is enough for our understanding of how to keep the apples on the table next time. For that we do not need Einstein. Newtonian physics is a special case of Einstein's physics. Just as the laws of gravitation were not abolished by Einstein, so the psychological mechanism of imitation is not abolished in its field of application by the deeper psychology of Freud.

Conscious imitation is only a small part of the psychological processes initiated by comics reading. Beneath is a kind of subconscious imitation called *identification*. The bridge of associations that links a child in this way to a comic-book figure and causes identification may be very slight. Rational resemblance or logical comparison has relatively little to do with identification. What is important is the emotional part of the reaction. The child gets pleasure from poring over what a comic-book figure does, is emotionally stirred and identifies himself with the figure that is active, successful, dominates a situation and satisfies an instinct, even though the child may only half understand what that instinct means. He looks for the same sensation again and becomes conditioned to identify himself with the same type that stimulates him to seek and satisfy the same pleasure again.

In investigating the mechanism of identification in individual children with individual comic books, it became clear to me that comic books are conditioning children to identify themselves with the strong man, however evil he may be. The hero in crime comics is not the hero unless he acts like a criminal. And the criminal in comic books is not a criminal to the child because he acts like a hero. He lives like a hero until the very end, and even then he often dies like a hero, in a burst of gunfire and violence.

Identification, which is part of the conditioning process, is of course greatly influenced by a child's other or earlier experiences. So that even when one studies such a factor as comic books in relative isolation, one must take into account many

other factors in a child's life. The mechanism of identification, therefore, is at the same time a cause and a result. Identification itself may or may not lead to imitative action. The reading of crime comics is not a release in action, but leads more to passivity and daydreams. Where it does result in activity, the actions are never constructive. The scenes of sadism, sex and crime in comic books arouse the child's emotions, but leave him only a limited scope of release in action. These actions can only be masturbatory or delinquent.

Since the heroes of crime comics invariably commit violent acts of one kind or another just as the criminals do, the child must identify himself with violent characters.

It has been claimed that if a child identifies himself with a violent character in a comic book it shows the individual child's psychological need to express his own aggression. But this reasoning is far too mechanical. Comic books are not a mirror of the individual child's mind; they are a mirror of the child's environment. They are a part of social reality. They not only have an effect, they also have a cause. When we level a constant barrage of crime and violence at young children, it leads them inevitably to preoccupation with these subjects. Subjective and objective factors are closely interwoven in a reciprocal relationship. In this preoccupation there is an element of projection of inner factors and an element of selection from the environment. The very fact that crime comics are socially tolerated shows how much expression of hostility we tolerate and even encourage. The more hostility there is in a child's home, the more threatening he finds his school and social environment, the more likely he is to show identifications with people who fight each other as they do in comic books.

I had occasion to follow the development of a girl from the age of two to nine. Before she had learned to read, she began to pore over comic books. Her favorites were Westerns. She got them from her older brothers who had stacks of all kinds of crime comics. There was considerable conflict in their home,

which this little girl witnessed. In conversations with her, as well as on projective tests, it was noteworthy that she was mostly preoccupied with people and animals being "mad" at each other. You might say that this preoccupation with hostility could not come from the comic books because so many children who do not have it read comics. You could also say that her preoccupation could not come from the conflict at home because so many young children have a similar home environment and do not have such fantasies. The correct interpretation is that both factors were operative, interacting with each other and reinforcing each other.

The general lesson we have deduced from our large case material is that the bad effects of crime comic books exist potentially for all children and may be exerted along these lines:

- 1) The comic-book format is an invitation to illiteracy.
- 2) Crime comic books create an atmosphere of cruelty and deceit.
- 3) They create a readiness for temptation.
- 4) They stimulate unwholesome fantasies.
- 5) They suggest criminal or sexually abnormal ideas.
- 6) They furnish the rationalization for them, which may be ethically even more harmful than the impulse.
- 7) They suggest the forms a delinquent impulse may take and supply details of technique.
- 8) They may tip the scales toward maladjustment or delinquency.

Crime comics are an agent with harmful potentialities. They bring about a mass conditioning of children, with different effects in the individual case. A child is not a simple unit which exists outside of its living social ties. Comic books themselves may be the virus, or the cause of a lack of resistance to the social virus of a harmful environment.

v

Retooling for Illiteracy

The Influence of Comic Books on Reading

“Reading maketh a full man.”

—Bacon

While we were carrying out our investigations on the effects of comic books, gathering more and more cases, following up old ones and analyzing the new comic books themselves, there were changes going on. Not that crime comics got any better—that was believed only by those who did not study them.

One interesting new development was that whole comic books and comic-book stories appeared in other publications that did not look like comic books from outside. Sometimes a comic book would be sold as a comic as usual, but would also appear, without its cover, in an ordinary magazine. Thus the reader is relieved of the trouble of tackling connected text and can peruse at least some of the stories in the magazine by the simple picture-gazing method appropriate to the comic book format. Or maybe the idea is that the young adult readers of such a magazine have barely graduated from comic books and find regular reading too hard. A regular twenty-five-cent pulp magazine, for example, has in the middle of it a whole sexy science-fiction comic book, which alone and under a different title sells for ten cents. When the enticing blonde heroine says: "Keep those paws to yourself, space-rat!" the magazine reader can save himself the effort of reading. It is clear from the picture what is meant. The magazine prints some enthusiastic responses from readers to the comic-book section innovation.

"Your comic section is wonderful," writes one. "Being only 16 years old," writes another, "I just love your illustrated section. Please make it longer."

This undercover extension of the comic book format has also spread to what on the outside appear to be regular magazines in the children's field. *Children's Digest*, published by *Parents' Magazine* at the stiff price of thirty-five cents, contains sections in typical comic-book form with bad colors and crowded balloons. The text has the comic-book flavor, too.

A similar children's magazine, *Tween Age Digest*, at twenty-five cents, also looks like a regular magazine, but has comic-book sections. One of these is a supercondensed comic-book

version of Don Quixote. You see him lying on the ground: "The servants beat Don Quixote mercilessly and although he swore vengeance he was helpless as a beetle on his back."

When a publisher was asked recently about this spreading of the comic-book style to regular publications he answered: "That is simple. We are *retooling for illiteracy*."

All the negative effects of crime comics on children in the intellectual, emotional and volitional spheres are intensified by the harm done in the perceptual sphere. Comic books are death on reading.

The dawn of civilization was marked by the invention of writing. Reading, therefore, is not only one of the cornerstones of civilized life, it is also one of the main foundations of a child's adjustment to it.

Children are like flowers. If the soil is good and the weather is not too catastrophic, they will grow up well enough. You do not have to threaten them, you do not have to psychoanalyze them, and you do not have to punish them any more than wind and storm punish flowers. But there are some things you have to bring to them, teach them, patiently and expertly. The most important of these is reading. A readiness to learn to read is developed by healthy children spontaneously. But for the reading process, and especially for the habit of reading, comprehending, assimilating and utilizing the printed word, the child requires the help of his elders.

When we indulge in huge generalizations in discussing such questions as why people act this way or that, why they believe or tolerate this or that, or the other, we usually forget the simple question of why it is that so many people cannot read properly. Statistics on illiteracy indicate not only that many people *do* not read books, but also that many *cannot* read well enough to absorb a book or an average magazine article. According to Ruth McCoy Harris, in an article on reading, one out of twenty-five Americans cannot read at all, and three out of five adults "do not read well. Millions read nothing but the comics."

Reading difficulties in childhood constitute one of the most important areas of mental hygiene. This has been recognized by the establishing of what Dr. Stella Center, a remedial-reading expert, calls "a new institution in the educational world," reading clinics. Reading clinics are unfortunately very few, children with reading difficulties unbelievably numerous. According to a survey made by a committee and presented at the Secondary Education Board in 1951, 5 per cent to 10 per cent of high school children and college students are so deficient in reading that they need individual remedial instruction, and an additional 10 per cent to 15 per cent read so poorly that small group instruction for them is desirable. According to the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 12 per cent of all American children fail in learning to read as well as the average of their class.

A survey sponsored by the New York City Association of Teachers of English and the New York City Association of Teachers of Speech, made public in 1952, reveals these significant data: of students entering high school as freshmen, 33 per cent are retarded at least one year in reading; by the time these students have reached the fifth term the percentage has risen to 40 per cent. Of the children routinely referred to the Queens General Hospital Mental Hygiene Clinic for any reason, every eighth child had a reading problem. Sometimes this had not been recognized before either by teacher or parents, and the child had been punished without the root of his difficulties being known to him or his guardians.

Reading troubles in children are on the increase. An important cause of this increase is the comic book. A very large proportion of children who cannot read well habitually read comic books. They are not really readers, but gaze mostly at the pictures, picking up a word here and there. Among the worst readers is a very high percentage of comic-book addicts who spend very much time "reading" comic books. They are book-worms without books.

Parents and other adults are often deceived into believing the children can read because they “read so many comics.” In teaching children to read, the schools have to compete with the pictures of comic books. Low-grade literacy is the long-range result. One of the Lafargue researchers, a physician, visited the library of a public school. There were about thirty boys there. Two of them were reading newspapers and eleven of them were reading comic books.

Scientific understanding of reading disorders requires a knowledge of the research done on reading during the last few decades, of brain pathology, of the modern psychological tests—general, projective and special reading tests—a psychiatric understanding of children, and a concrete acquaintance with the social conditions of children and the educational process that affects them.

Reading is not a circumscribed, isolated function of the brain, but a highly complex performance. Visual comprehension contains many more abstract elements than, for example, motor behavior. Psychologically speaking, reading is a very high performance. To see a real apple and try to grasp it is much simpler than to read the word *apple*, which is on the one hand an abstraction and yet has potentially many associations not only visually but also in the sphere of hearing, touch, smell and taste.

Reading disorders are much more frequent in some countries than in others—in the United States and England, for example, rather than in Germany. In a study of 51,000 children in the schools of Munich, contrary to expectation, only ten were found (ages ten to fourteen) with serious reading disorders. So it is not accidental that most of the research in this field has been done in England and the United States. The difference in frequency may have little to do with the methods of examination or the methods used in teaching reading, or with any differences between German and English and American children. It is the result of differences in the language itself. In the English lan-

guage, spelling is much more difficult because the spelling and the sound may be so different. The child has to learn to pronounce a word differently from what it seems to be according to its spelling. The letter *a*, for instance, has to be pronounced differently in different words, while for the child learning to read in German the letter *a* has only one visual vocal association. In English, the letter *u* may represent twenty-four different sounds.

The process of reading requires intactness of complex brain mechanisms which regulate the functions of organization (putting things in order), direction, spatial orientation and association between different special sense data. If a child has a weakness in this respect, it will not show up in any simple performance. It may be outgrown, remedied by experience or compensated for. If, however, a very high level of performance is demanded, such as reading and knowing the spelling and sound of such words as *through* and *trough*, *bow* and *bough*, the symptom that appears on the surface may be a reading disability.

Many children whose trouble lies in the field of reading are wrongly diagnosed. This is due primarily to the fact that the frustration from the reading failure leads to all kinds of other emotional troubles. There is in fact a vicious circle. Emotional factors may lead to reading difficulties and chronic reading failure may cause emotional disturbances. Often behavior disorders clear up when the reading disorder is cured, and reading improves when emotional problems are straightened out. In my routine work over many years in mental hygiene clinics I have found children with reading disability wrongly committed to institutions for mental defectives, regarded as psychopathic or incorrigible without any regard for their reading disability, or given the facile and so often false diagnosis of childhood schizophrenia. These erroneous diagnoses, as well as the prevalent neglect of children's reading difficulties, are the more deplorable because most of these children could be helped.

The diagnosis of reading disorders is established by special reading tests, the selection of tests being adapted to the individual case, and the test results evaluated in combination with a general psychiatric and social study of the child.

There is a high correlation between intelligence, vocabulary and reading. Comic-book readers are handicapped in vocabulary building because in comics all the emphasis is on the visual image and not on the proper word. These children often know all that they should not know about *torture*, but are unable to read or spell the word. For practical purposes a basis for diagnosis, as well as therapy, is intelligence. The child with reduced intelligence whose reading level is up to the level of his intelligence, but below expectancy for his age and grade, is considered a case of *reading retardation*.

When the child's reading level is below his mental level, the condition is regarded as a *reading disability*. If the reading ability of a very bright child is average for his age and grade, he is actually functioning below his potentialities for learning and deserves special remedial attention, because he is not up to his reading grade level according to tests.

The word *specific* is sometimes added to *reading disability* and the diagnostic label "specific reading disability" used. But this addition means very little. Usually the disorder is not specific, although it does require specific treatment, that is, remedial-reading training. Lack of interest in reading is often a reaction to failure in reading, a symptom indicating that other causal factors are operating in the creation of a reading problem. It may be a reaction to dislike or fear of school, pointing to more serious underlying difficulties. Failure in reading occurs not infrequently because a child has developed the illusion that he can read because he can follow a comic-book story from the pictures with the occasional reading of a word or two in the balloons. The bad reading and/or language habits he develops from such reading interfere with laying the foundation for

proper reading habits. The basis of a child's future reading career is usually laid down in the first and second grades. It is at this stage that comic books do the greatest harm with respect to reading. Children who may be most efficient in other spheres get more and more behind in mastering the reading process. Instead of learning good reading habits they acquire the habit of not reading. They become slow readers, meanwhile continuing to read their comic books.

The hereditary factor has been grossly exaggerated. The theories according to which reading disabilities are chiefly due to heredity express the most reactionary attitude. They relieve us of the responsibility, which is so necessary for purposes of prevention, to evaluate properly the psychological and social factors.

The most significant causes of reading difficulties are: visual defects—particularly far-sightedness and poor fusion resulting from eye-muscle imbalance; auditory defects; speech defects; prolonged illness; frequent absences from school; frequent changes of school; emotional maladjustment; foreign language background; home conditions in their socio-economic and emotional aspects; poor teaching; lack of reading readiness.

Reading readiness is a most important concept. It is the acquired ability to profit from reading. In the British literature on reading disabilities it is spoken of as "timing." It is characterized by such factors as intellectual development, visual and auditory perception, language development, background of experience and social behavior.

This is precisely one of the points where comic books are so harmful. They retard or even interfere with reading readiness. In this they may act as a prime causal factor or merely as an aggravating influence. Comic-book reading is an inadequate experience. The child fastens on one experience at the expense of others. If he is given these wrong or harmful experiences, he loses out on constructive experiences.

An important area where comic books do specific harm is the acquisition of fluent left-to-right eye movements, which is so indispensable for good reading. The eyes have to form the habit of going from left to right on the printed line, then returning quickly to the left at a point slightly lower. Reversal tendencies and confusions are common among children at the age of six. As better reading habits are acquired, including the all-important left-to-right movements, reversals and other errors gradually diminish and may automatically disappear. It is different with the comic-book reader who acquires the habit of reading irregular bits of printing here and there in balloons instead of complete lines from left to right.

The best understanding of reading difficulties is obtained in the process of therapy. Success may be achieved by a variety of methods. The patient work of the remedial-reading teacher gets the best results if it is combined with understanding psychotherapy, constructive social service work and tactful family counseling. The reading teacher should work just a little below the child's level, so that the child will not get discouraged and will start emotionally with a successful and reassuring experience from the beginning. Comic-book reading is nowadays a real (though often not recognized) obstacle to therapy, for it is difficult—if not impossible—to keep a child away from comic books which are so temptingly displayed wherever he goes.

I have had occasion to study the reading problem specifically on over one hundred cases studied and treated at the Remedial Reading Clinic which I founded and organized at the Queens General Hospital and which functions under the direction of a trained remedial reading teacher. These children represented about every variety of reading disorder, and the results of their treatment were highly encouraging. The general gains they made were due chiefly to overcoming resistance to reading, increased security and confidence and amount of work accomplished. In the last respect comic-book readers are also handi-

capped. If a child can read good books, he can talk or even brag about it to his parents and others. The sort of community of interest established between children, and between them and adults, by reading and knowing the same stories and classics is one of the benefits derived by children from reading, and one that is lost to comic-book readers. They also lose the interest of being read to, because looking at pictures has robbed them of the art of listening. They cannot tell adults what they read and win approval by showing that they know by their own effort something that is interesting to adults. They are left with disjointed bits of reading about banks robbed and girls bound and beaten which are better left undiscussed with parents.

Reading disorders existed, of course, long before comic books. We know that they are due to a great variety of factors, but among these factors for the present-day child comic books have a definite place. Moreover reading difficulties among children have increased and are continuing to increase with the rise of the comic book.

The comic-book industry has successfully spread the fantastic idea that comic books are actually good for children's reading. So the fundamental question arises, How many children suffering from reading disorders are comic-book readers? The answer is simple. Most of them are. Comic books, especially crime comics, are a significant part of these children's lives. If anything, they read them earlier and in greater numbers than other children.

Twelve-year-old Kenneth was referred by his school. Reading tests showed him to be an almost total non-reader. He "reads" fourteen to twenty comic books a day. Questioned about this, he says proudly, "Oh, yes! I can read some words! I can read *guns, police, Donald Duck* and *horse*. That's all. When I'm on the subway I can read *Times Square*. But when I had to go to Floral Park once I couldn't read it so I missed the stop."

Here is an unselected group, a whole class of the Reading Clinic:

SEX	AGE	SCHOOL	READING	COMIC BOOKS
		GRADE	GRADE	
boy	13	8th	3rd	A few comic books once in a while. Looks at pictures.
boy	12	6th	2nd	About 15 comic books a week. "Reads" most of them.
boy	12	5th	3rd	About 25-30 comic books a week. Looks at pictures; reads "sometimes."
boy	12	6th	primer; below 1st	About 15 comic books a week. Looks at pictures.
boy	12	7th	2nd	About 6 comic books a week. Looks at pictures; tries to read.
boy	11	6th	1st	50 to 75 comic books a week, 10 to 15 at a time. Looks at pictures.
boy	11	3rd	2nd	5 to 8 comic books a week. Looks at pictures. Tries to read.
girl	11	ungraded	2nd	2 to 6 comic books a week. Reads and looks at pictures.
boy	10	5th	2nd	20 comic books a week. Looks at pictures.
boy	10	4th	2nd	About 3 comic books a week. Looks at pictures. Now trying to read.
girl	9	3rd	2nd	About 5 comic books a week. Looks at pictures.

An interesting sidelight on such a sample group is the fact that these eleven children coming from families screened by social workers for attendance at a free clinic were an economic asset to the comic-book industry to the tune of almost twenty dollars a week.

Severe reading disorders and chronic addiction to comic books are very often associated. That alone indicates that comics do not work in the direction of literacy. Norman, aged twelve, had a severe reading disability owing to a visual dis-

order for which he had received treatment. His drawings gave evidence of some disorientation and distortion. Such a boy is in need of a great deal of careful remedial training. But instead of giving him early diagnosis and treatment, society made a comic-book addict out of him: "I read all different kinds of crime comics. I read many of them. I get the point of the story by just looking at the pictures."

Raymond, aged nine, was in the fourth grade. His mother said, "He does not learn well in school and cries at night." It was found that he needed remedial-reading training at the grade-1 level. Comic books absorbed most of his time and attention: "My favorites are all of them. I like the escape stuff. I looked at comic books that had all about escape, like *Batman*, a prisoner escaping from the prison. I used to wake up at night screaming. Since my mother left the light on in the living room, I haven't had that so much. In the dream, when I scream, I can't remember anything in the morning. I read about five comic books a day. I keep looking at them."

Reading difficulties are of course common in the school classes for children with retarded mental development. We have therefore in our investigation made special studies in these classes. They afford additional conclusive proof that severe reading difficulties and maximum comic-book reading go hand in hand, and that far from being a help to reading, comic books are a causal and reinforcing factor in children's reading disorders.

Here is an abstract of a survey of a whole ungraded class made by one of my assistants, who is a teacher and a psychologist. This class was composed entirely of boys. They were unselected cases of a series. The teacher had considerable difficulty in teaching them to read. She felt that even the language in the comic books interfered with learning to read. They could not read the original words, so it did not help their reading power when in comic books the word was abbreviated or in dialect. For example, in comics the children saw *th'* when they

did not know how to read the word *the*, or they saw *gal* when they could not recognize the word *girl*. The teacher also found that comic books emphasized the poor features of the children's environment. The favorite scenes in comic books were precisely what children in slum areas, for instance, see too often in real life: assault and brutality, women who are hit or beaten, pocketbook snatching, etc. The teacher found that comic books were a definite hindrance not only to the reading progress, but also to the acquisition of social principles by these handicapped children. Every child in this class had been studied for two years by the same teacher. The children who were transferred to other classes or were late admissions were not included in this survey. Such a survey shows how children who are both socially and psychologically handicapped have to face the added complication of crime comics.

	AGE	HIGHEST GRADE REACHED	I.Q.	READING GRADE	COMMENTS
<i>Tommy</i>	11 yrs.	3rd	72	0	House where family lives is in a very deteriorated condition. Boy sleeps in same bed with brothers aged 6 and 12. He is considered "very wise in the ways of the street."

Comic books: "I like ghost stories and murder comics. They teach you not to curse nobody."

<i>Ralph</i>	11 yrs.	5th	69	1.5	Took money from children in the lower grades. Family lives in basement apartment with large rat-holes, broken floor boards, flies and leaking overhead pipes; furniture worn past recognition. Father unemployed;
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	HIGHEST GRADE AGE REACHED	READING I.Q. GRADE	COMMENTS
			mother in poor health. Sleeps in one bed with two brothers aged 6 and 13.
			<i>Comic books:</i> "In crime comics they murder people with guns and knife and strangle them. They stick up banks and stagecoach. My sister looks at murder comics and at night screams that she sees a man over there. Some men kill girls 'cause the ladies be rich. Men see lady walking down street and push them in front of train, sometimes tie them up. Some boys try to do like what's in the comic books. They take ladies' pocketbooks and beat them up and run off. Women kill the men, knife 'em, sometimes take men to dance and while dancing jook [sic] them in the back with a knife."
<i>Harry</i>	9 yrs.	3rd 73 1.3	Good home conditions. Spends a lot of time with television.
			<i>Comic books:</i> "I like <i>Gangbusters</i> , <i>Crime Does Not Pay</i> , <i>Batman</i> and <i>Superman</i> . They do murders, like shooting. The girls do things to the men. Catch bad men and take them to the law. Bullets bounce off girls in <i>Super Girl</i> . She can fly and swing on ropes."
<i>George</i>	10 yrs.	3rd 74 1.3	Very tough little boy who will fight anyone of whatever size or age. Sleeps in one bed with three brothers aged 2, 5 and 11.
			<i>Comic books:</i> "I don't remember the names of the comic books. They hold up coffee store and when girl reach for gun shoot them. Man make girls hold up stores. Other people learn about killing and taking ladies' pocketbooks. They learn about murders, but not me. I learn good stuff. Don't take nothing from no kid's house when you go up their house."

		HIGHEST GRADE REACHED	I.Q.	READING GRADE	COMMENTS
<i>Henry</i>	10 yrs.	2nd	65	1.2	Lives with foster parents who do not speak English. Basement apartment consists of kitchen and bedroom. <i>Comic books:</i> "I like <i>Superman</i> . I forget the bad things. I forget all that's in the crime books. I forget about how they robbed the bank. The men want to kill the girls. Maybe because they have jewels."
<i>John</i>	12 yrs.	4th	67	2.1	Sleeps with 13-year-old sister in one bedroom. Parents separated. <i>Comic books:</i> "Captain Marvel was fighting ants and the ants grow big. Had a lady and was going to kill her and he escaped and fought ants and saved the lady. An ant helped him. In mysteries and crime comics they poison each other, dynamite caves and blow people up. Girls play men for fools and when men rob banks they give money to the women and they buy mink coats and when men don't like it they kill them. <i>Superman</i> ladies hardly do anything."
<i>Dick</i>	12 yrs.	4th	54	1.4	Father left family when boy was very young. <i>Comic books:</i> "I like the way they fight and when they kill people. The books tells about murder, killing and shooting and some love."
<i>Peter</i>	11 yrs.	3rd	72	0	Mother is dead. <i>Comic books:</i> "In murder books men steal and throw the cop off the roof and kill about five men. Some make you scared at night. You dream about it and think somebody's coming to kill you. Some tells about stealing, killing people, some stick with knives, shoot with guns, beat them over their heads with sticks and stick them in the eyes, hit 'em over the head with a poker and string them up with ropes. I can read them now 'cause I know what's right and wrong. My aunt teaches me not to do bad things."

	HIGHEST GRADE AGE REACHED	READING I.Q. GRADE	COMMENTS	
<i>Jack</i>	12 yrs.	2nd	61 1.5	Very neglected child. Has to get up early in the morning and prepare his own meals. Grandmother, this boy, his brother, aged 4, and sister, aged 3, sleep in the same room. <i>Comic books:</i> Knows many comic books. "Cowboys are bad. They steal money out of the express office. The boys beat the girls up and Superman comes to help the girls. The boys are bad because they do things they shouldn't. They set houses on fire. The comics teach boys how to rob and join up in gangs."
<i>Sam</i>	12 yrs.	5th	66 1.5	Frequent family assistance from Department of Welfare. <i>Comic books:</i> "I read all kinds of comics except love. I don't like them. The only time I read <i>them</i> is when I've seen all the rest of the comics."
<i>Paul</i>	10 yrs.	4th	64 .7	Mother deserted family; father works nights. <i>Comic books:</i> Knows the names of many comics and says they are all his favorites. "The Indians shot a man in the eye with an arrow. The soldier took his sword and stuck it in him. The Indian took the soldier's rifle, killed everyone in the fort and the boy was shot right in the back and a baby was shot with a bullet and then the troopers came and they warred. I don't like mystery comics any more 'cause I dream about them and I can't sleep."
<i>Marvin</i>	9 yrs.	3rd	65 1.1	Brother also in ungraded class. <i>Comic books:</i> "Cops and robbers fight. Robbers don't have money. They buy a cheap gun or little guns and go rob a bank."

	HIGHEST		READING		COMMENTS
AGE	GRADE	REACHED	I.Q.	GRADE	
<i>Jimmy</i>	9 yrs.	ungraded	72	1.5	Father in tuberculosis sanitarium. Children neglected. Truant.
					<i>Comic books:</i> "I have no comics. I read my sister's. I like cowboy stories. They kill too much in the mystery comics. I don't like it because I dream about it. I dream ghost stories."
<i>Bob</i>	12 yrs.	3rd	56	0	One of 11 siblings. The boys sleep in one room in bunk beds, 4 brothers in the upper bed, 4 in the lower bed. The sisters have a bunk bed in another room.

Comic books: "I like *Superman*. A man be laying down in bed and the door be locked and the lady run outside for help and hollers. The man comes through the window. Girls are always getting hurt in comic books. Every time the girl goes with a man there is murder and the girl screams."

Reading disorders, whatever their cause, are profoundly disturbing in a child's life. These children have to perform on a level far above their functioning capacity in an atmosphere of competition, and under the critique of teachers and parents they are exposed to an ever-present threat. They have to cope with something they do not understand. Almost with the precision of an experiment they are placed in a situation of ever-increasing frustration and disorientation. Going over the records of such children, I find noted over and over again: lack of self-esteem; no self-confidence in school; "seems to lack interest in subjects he used to like"; estrangement from parents; shame; suspicion; hostility; feelings of inferiority; fear; truancy; running away from home; such characteristics as disruptive, unmanageable, rebellious, over-aggressive, destructive, discour-

aged; attitude of defeat; "doubts his learning ability in any field."

Over the years I have found a relatively high correlation between delinquency and reading disorders; that is to say, a disproportionate number of poor or non-readers become delinquent, and a disproportionate number of delinquents have pronounced reading disorders. Often such children are harmed by comic books in two ways. Comics reading reinforces the reading disorder, if it has not helped to cause it in the first place, and the child, frustrated by failure, is made more liable to commit a defiant act. At the same time comic books suggest all kinds of specific defiant acts to commit.

Judge Jacob Panken, a New York City Children's Court judge who has paid particular attention to reading, described the situation he found among delinquents in his court. "I have boys and girls—fifteen, sixteen years of age—who attend the high schools of our city, and some of these children cannot read one-syllable words! Yet they are in high school—second term, third term . . . Now I asked these children, 'What do you read?' and the answer is 'Comic books.'"

In cases of serious delinquency or crime the problem of severe reading disability sometimes comes up and usually receives little attention. It would be wrong to think that in such cases inability to read has driven an individual directly to the antisocial act. But it is equally wrong to disregard entirely such a severe handicap, which often in devious ways drives a young person to all kinds of emotional short circuits. In England recently a boy of sixteen shot one policeman between the eyes and wounded another. The case created a brief sensation. As a witness on the stand, the boy's father described his son as "a gentle boy." He was the youngest in a family of eight and attended school until he was fifteen.

Q.: In spite of that he never managed to read?

A.: No. He suffered from what I believe is known as word blindness.

Q.: As a result of that, the only reading matter he is familiar with is what are called comic books?

A.: Yes.

Q.: Eighteen months ago he went to a Bible class?

A.: Yes. But unfortunately he did not like that because he was very nervous of being asked to read a lesson and as he could not read, it would have been a very embarrassing experience for him, and for that reason he said he did not want to continue.

“Word blindness” constitutes a severe reading disability. According to my experience it can be greatly improved, and even cured, by competent therapy. Here then is a boy who has to struggle against a serious handicap. This creates a gap in his life which is filled for him by adult society with crime comic books. What he learned from them was apparent enough at the trial. It was testified that he had shouted at the policeman: “Come on, you brave coppers! Let us have it out!”

I can match this almost verbally: “Let’s see you try to take me, you big brave coppers!” says a comic book on my desk.

This sixteen-year-old boy was sentenced to jail for life, his nineteen-year-old co-defendant, who was also illiterate and could not read anything except comic books, was hanged. It is, of course, easier to hang a boy than to give him remedial-reading instruction, and still easier to say he would have committed the crime anyhow. “Let us put out of our minds in this case any question of comics,” said the judge. But who can say that the crime would have occurred if this boy’s reading disability had been cured early and he had been given decent literature to read instead of comic books?

It is safe to say that it is almost impossible to exaggerate the havoc reading disabilities cause in a child’s life. There is one redeeming feature. Reading disorders, of whatever cause, may be long-drawn-out affairs, but they need not be permanent. They are amenable to competent treatment. This must consist first of all in remedial-reading instruction, which preferably

should be given three times a week, by trained instructors. It is not good enough if the newspapers carry an official announcement of a remedial-reading program giving teachers what is euphemistically called "intensive training" that lasts "one week"!

Competent remedial-reading teaching may show good results in a pupil even in four to six months. Not only does the reading itself improve, but often beneficial effects like the appearance of positive emotional attitudes may be observed. Sometimes the progress is stormy, with periods of increased aggressiveness and marked resistance. The children give up unfavorable attitudes eventually, though, and become aware of their ability to learn. Sometimes it is just as difficult to determine what makes these children well as to decide what caused the trouble in the first place. The relationship to the teacher and to the other children in remedial-reading teaching plays a big role. But the most important thing is the patient, competent actual remedial-reading training itself.

Only a very small percentage of the children who need it receive treatment. The United Parents Associations have estimated that there are 104,000 children in New York City schools who are poor readers and that of all these "only 2,500 are actually getting adequate remedial instruction." Even this is an optimistic statement. In 1943, before the establishment of the Queens General Hospital Reading Clinic I had a study made by psychiatric social service workers of the facilities available in Queens County for the many children there with reading disorders who could not afford private fees. The answers from the various authorities and public and private agencies were revealing in their vagueness. The result of this inquiry was the discovery that "there are practically no facilities"! This was true of a big, growing county in the richest city in the world.

The Queens General Hospital Reading Clinic, which employs one remedial-reading teacher, could of course take only a small number of children and quickly developed a long waiting list.

It was the only reading clinic that was entirely free in the whole of New York City in the summer months.

Comic books harm the development of the reading process from the lowest level of the most elementary hygiene of vision to the highest level of learning to appreciate how to read a good literary book. Print is easy to read when the paper background is light and the printing a good contrasting black. Yet most comics are smudgily printed on pulp paper. The printing is crowded in balloons with irregular lines. Any adult can check on the eyestrain involved by reading a few comic books himself. We *can* produce the most beautifully printed books and pamphlets; every morning my mail has advertising matter expertly designed and handsomely printed on expensive paper. Yet to our children we give the crudest and most ill-designed products.

Reading the comic-book text is often difficult. For example, the reading material in the huge present crop of horror comics is hard to make out even for the average adult reader. But all the emotional emphasis of comics is on the pictures, and that is where they do the most harm to reading. The discrepancy between the easy appeal of the pictures and the difficulty of reading the text is too great to encourage anyone to try to follow what the characters are supposed to be saying.

Even the simplest comic book requires at least a third-grade reading ability. In the course of studying children with reading disorders who are at the same time great comic-book readers, I have found many who have developed a special kind of "reading." They have become what I call "picture readers." Later I learned that not only children with reading difficulties, but also those with good reading ability, are seduced by comic books into "picture reading." This is of course another point where comic books exert a pernicious influence on the general child population.

Picture reading consists in gazing at the successive pictures of the comic book with a minimal reading of printed letters. Children may read the title, or occasionally an exclamation

when the picture is particularly violent or sexually intriguing. This kind of picture reading is not actually a form of reading, nor is it a pre-stage of real reading. It is an evasion of reading and almost its opposite. Habitual picture readers are severely handicapped in the task of becoming readers of books later, for the habit of picture reading interferes with the acquisition of well-developed reading habits.

The percentage of picture readers among children who read many comic books is large. Here is a typical example. Jimmy, a boy of fifteen, was referred to me on account of trouble in school. He was in the third term of high school. His reading grade level was 2.4. During one of the Hookey Club sessions, when the question of which children should be given working papers was being debated, he presented his own case: "I want to leave school. I'll be sixteen in January. I can't leave school until I have a job. I don't pay attention in school. I think it is boring. I was left back three times and put ahead twice. I would like anything but school."

Another Hookey Club member: "What was your last trouble in school?"

Jimmy: "I know I can't read. That's why I don't like school."

A third Hookey Club member gave him a schoolbook and asked him to read a few sentences. Jimmy, reading aloud, ". . ." He could not read a single simple sentence without making a mistake.

A girl in the group asked him, "Do you read comic books?"

Jimmy: "I don't read comics. I just look at the pictures—*Crime Does Not Pay*, *True Detective*, *Superman*. I get the story by just looking at the pictures. Once in a while, when a good part comes, I read what I can, but the words I don't know I just pass over. When it is a short story and it looks interesting—when it is bad and they shoot each other—and when they get the woman—then I try to read it."

Another eleven-year-old picture-reader has this to say: "I don't try to read them except once in a while if I know a word."

Schoolteachers and college authorities are becoming aware of increasing reading difficulties. Colleges have been forced to make reading classes available to their freshmen. Universities have instituted special courses which are actually nothing but remedial-reading courses, despite their high-sounding titles: "Communications," etc.

This low-grade literacy shows also in the fact that many people say they have no time to read a book, instead of giving the real reason: that they cannot read one. According to the *Authors' League Bulletin*, one-third of the people who leave school before high school never open a book for the rest of their lives.

The responsibility of comic books for reading disorders is manifold. They have prevented and are preventing early detection of reading difficulties, by masking the disorder and giving parents the impression that the child *can* read; they aggravate reading difficulties that already exist; they cause reading disorders by luring children with the primary appeal of pictures as against early training to real reading; they attack the child just at the age of six or seven when basic reading skills ought to be developed, and again at pre-adolescence when on a higher level good reading habits should be fostered. Discerning teachers are well aware of this.

There is not a single good psychological study based on scientific data that would show that comic books may help children to read. An article published by a member of the Board of Experts of the *Superman* publisher is based on elaborate word-counts and statistics. It comes to the conclusion that comic books "provide a substantial amount of reading experience" and "may have real value for the educator." What he describes as a "reading experience" is in fact mostly a non-reading experience. It evidently has not occurred to this *Superman* expert that most children do not read the many words which he has counted.

The general statement has been made that comic books might be helpful for children "who will not read anything

else." That is certainly pedagogically unsound. Of course there are children who have been corrupted by comic books so that they do not want to read anything else, to the detriment of their ability to acquire proper reading habits. But is it sound to advise that addiction to comic-book reading be cured by addiction to comic-book reading?

While comic books harm children in acquiring the basic skills of reading, they harm them even more on the higher level of learning to appreciate and like the content of good reading matter. This has been recognized by literary critics and by librarians. Julia Todd Hallen, writing in the *Tacoma Times*, says, "Too many fail to realize that with a child's first books his appreciation of good books is begun."

In questioning hundreds of children I have found that comic-book reading and reading good books for pleasure are for all purposes opposites. Actually many children nowadays do not know what the word *classic* means; they think it means a "classics" comic book. For many children, the entire concept of *book* is concerned with comic books. I have yet to see a child who was influenced to read "classics" or "famous authors" in the original by reading them in comic-book versions. What happens instead is that the comic-book version cuts the children off from this source of pleasure, entertainment and education. Typical is the case of the eleven-year-old boy of superior intelligence, from a good social and economic background, who exhibited the "classics" comic-book version of *Robinson Crusoe* with these words: "Why should I read the real book if I have this? If I had to make a report I could use this. It would leave out all the boring details that would be in a book."

What is the experience of librarians? Ida M. Anderson, of the Providence Public Library, has written: "Many parents and educators have expressed to me their agreement with us on the stand that such reading of comic books has a pernicious effect on the reading habits of children. . . . That comic books

encourage the reading of books is contrary to the experience of librarians. Circulation of juvenile books in libraries all over the country has decreased greatly since the reading of comic books has become so popular. . . . The representative of a comic-book publisher suggested that libraries have stimulated the circulation of children's books by posting a sign: 'Superman Recommends These.' The Providence Public Library tried this, but the chief result was a request for *Superman* rather than for the books listed."

What the comic books of "classics" and "famous authors" do shows our disregard for literature or for children or for both. In the comic books which go to millions of children, these mutilations are advertised with such phrases as "Told in the Modern Manner," "No longer is it necessary to wade through hundreds of pages of text . . . preserve all the excitement and interest . . . if it's thrills you want, then you'll find them a-plenty . . . Ask your parents if they think you should read Shakespeare . . ." *Macbeth* is offered to your child "Streamlined for Action," ". . . a dark tragedy of jealousy, intrigue and violence adapted for easy and enjoyable reading. Packed with action from start to finish . . ." Shakespeare and the child are corrupted at the same time.

By looking at the pictures and reading sporadically a title or an exclamation, a child can follow to some extent the plot of one of these versions of "great stories," or at least what the editor and the child think the plot is. A fourteen-year-old boy in the eighth year at school, with a second-grade reading level, says that he has read the "classics" version of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*: "It is called *The Mad Doctor*. He makes medicine. He drinks it and turns into a beast. He kills a little girl. The cops chase him. Then he changes into a man. He comes to a famous home and falls in love with a girl. He keeps changing. Finally he gets shot. While dying he changes back to a human being. I like when he comes to the little girl and hits her with a cane."

On the highest level of reading, comic books influence the creative abilities of children. One can see that from the stories that gifted children write. Where good reading stimulates them to imaginative writing, under the comic-book influence their natural gifts are directed to a cheap killing-the-girl, electric-chair romanticism. In a recent school magazine edited and got out by the pupils themselves there is a typical story, showing comic-book influence. It tells graphically of a young man who rides in a car with his girl. Another car draws up alongside them and a man with a silencer on his gun shoots and kills the girl. The cab-driver thinks the young man did it, "the dirty rat," and calls the police. The young man escapes to Mexico. But he is arrested and charged with the murder. We leave him in jail waiting for the electric chair, although he is innocent. The story closes with this fittingly crude verse:

A flash of light,
The pull of a switch,
The chair in its might
Kills a son of a bitch!

Spelling in comic books is often faulty. "The Case of the Psycopathic [*sic*] Lady" is not good for children in either content or spelling. Comic-book writing is also extremely poor in style and language. It is no help to the child to learn such barbaric neologisms as suspenstories (the name of an "authorized" comic book). And the editorial comments are no better than the story text; *e.g.*, this "cosmic correspondence":

"Greetings, humanoids! Drag over a cyclotron and crawl in! (If we'da known you were coming, we'da baked an isotope!)"

Comic books also have many words that are not words at all. For example, there may be a series of six pictures with violent scenes with no language, just sounds which have no real spelling. From one typical comic book alone, a Western endorsed by a psychiatrist on the first page, I have made this partial list:

OWW

ARGHH

OOOHHH

WHAM

GLURG

UGH

GLHELP

KURRACK

KAPOW

PING

THUNK

BLAM

YEOW

UNGH

BAM

ZING

AANGH

ARRGG

OOOOO! HAH!

GLUG-UGH

One Hookey Club boy called it "basic American."

Language reflects attitudes. In crime comics the language of criminals and their women companions is glorified. I have had referred to me quite a number of unruly children who expressed at home or in school a typical disobedient, arrogant, impudent, smart-alecky attitude. I found that one can help these children, and that many of their expressions were merely a superficial copying of the corresponding typical attitude repeated over and over again in comic books.

In one comic book is a sexy picture of a blonde female dressed in a string of beads and a scrap of material. She says: "A gentleman, he never blackjacked a woman. He hit them with his fists." Millions of children have been taught that this kind of thing is the smart thing to say.

All clean fun, say the spokesmen for the industry. But what children have told me does not bear this out. There are always some who absorb these attitudes. How insensitive must adults be not to realize that this language itself expresses an unfortunate attitude—the attitude of the crime comic book.

Design for Delinquency

*The Contribution of Crime Comic Books
to Juvenile Delinquency*

*“‘We do not know the cause.’ Is it not absurd
to think of ‘the’ cause? Should we, over that,
neglect the facts we have?”*

—Adolf Meyer, M.D.

The case was handled with the utmost secrecy. "The F.B.I.," the papers later proudly reported, "took no chances." Over twenty Federal agents armed with the latest weapons were strategically posted among bushes and along the road, ready to shoot it out with whatever violent enemies of society had sent the extortion note, with a threat to kill, to a Vanderbilt. They were waiting for the deadline, when the extortion money was to be handed over.

When it came, a slim schoolboy appeared from his hiding-place. In his pocket he carried a toy pistol. Quickly he was surrounded by the armed might of the United States Government which—without being aware of it—was fighting juvenile delinquency.

The boy was fifteen years old, was questioned three hours, was found "guilty of juvenile delinquency" and sentenced to six years in a Federal correction institution where, in the judge's words, he would be able "to adjust himself satisfactorily."

This is by no means an isolated instance. The fight of the armed might of the law against children has become routine. One Sunday night a patrolman in New Jersey reported to police headquarters that he had seen some suspicious movement in a meat market. Two squad cars sped to the scene and came to a screeching stop. Six policemen rushed out of the cars with drawn guns and surrounded the store. Then two of them entered it, ready for battle. Their quarry turned out to be—a handsome, blond, curly-headed little boy of six. His companions, who had fled when the rope snapped as they were lowering him through a skylight, were twelve and thirteen. The little boy, too young even for a juvenile delinquency charge, had started his career as a burglar at five, rewarded by his companions with a steady supply of candy and crime comic books.

In California two police cars pursued an automobile in a mad chase. The car had been stolen, evidently by criminals who had previously broken into a store. As the cars were speeding along, the police fired a salvo of shots. When the car came to

a stop, the policemen, guns in hand, walked up to it cautiously. Huddled in the seats were—six children. The youngest was eight, the oldest thirteen.

The authorities are fighting juvenile delinquents, not juvenile delinquency. There is an enormous literature on juvenile delinquency. One might think that society hopes to exorcise it by the magic of printer's ink. It would seem that the real scientific problem is conveniently overlooked. Juvenile delinquency does not just happen, for this or that reason. It is continuously re-created by adults. So the question should be, Why do we continuously re-create it? Even more than crime, juvenile delinquency reflects the social values current in a society. Both adults and children absorb these social values in their daily lives, at home, in school, at work, and also in all the communications imparted as entertainment, instruction or propaganda through the mass media, from the printed word to television. Juvenile delinquency holds a mirror up to society and society does not like the picture there. So it goes in for all kinds of recrimination directed at the children, including such facile high-sounding name-calling as "hysteroid personality," "hystero-compulsive personality," and "schizophrenic tendencies."

I have seen many children who drifted into delinquency through no fault or personal disorder of their own. When they wanted to extricate themselves they either had no adults to appeal to or those who were available had no help to offer. One evening at the Lafargue Clinic a thirteen-year-old boy came to see me. He was the head of a gang and, as a matter of fact, it was one that had lately been involved in a fight with a fatal shooting. I found out later that while he was in the Clinic he had two much bigger boys stationed in the corridor and at the street entrance to function as bodyguards in case a rival gang might appear. He was much concerned: "I want to stop the bloodshed," he said. There had been some friction between his boys and some boys of another gang. At this particular moment,

he told me, "the school is the most dangerous place," for that is where the boys would meet. "I am afraid they will fight with knives. We have our own meeting-place—nobody can find it. It is in an abandoned house." He wanted some of his boys to stay away from school for a while and during that period wanted to arrange a real peace. "But," he said, "it can't be done because the truant officer gets you and, of course, you can't explain it to him, and you can't tell it to the teacher, and you can't tell it to the police, and you can't tell it to your parents."

When we checked the situation later we found that what he said was precisely true. Had any adult in authority been as earnestly concerned about these gangfights as this boy was, they could have been stopped. The secret meeting-house, incidentally, was stacked full of textbooks for violent fighting—crime comics.

Delinquent children are children in trouble. Times have changed since the famous Colorado juvenile-court law of 1903. Now delinquency is different both in quantity and quality. By virtue of these changes it has become a virtually new social phenomenon. It has been reported that juvenile delinquency has increased about 20 per cent since I first spoke about crime comics in 1947. It is, however, not their number but the kind of juvenile delinquency that is the salient point. Younger and younger children commit more and more serious and violent acts. Even psychotic children did not act like this fifteen years ago. Here are some random samples of what today's juvenile delinquents actually do. A great deal that has been written and said about juvenile delinquency is invalid because the writers are obviously not familiar with today's cases:

- 1) Three boys, six to eight years old, took a boy of seven, hanged him nude from a tree, his hands tied behind him, then burned him with matches. Probation officers investigating found that they were re-enacting a comic-book plot.

- 2) A girl of eight, her six-year-old brother and a boy of thirteen threw a rock at the face of a three-year-old boy and beat him with a stick. Among other injuries the boy had "cuts inside his mouth."
- 3) A boy of eleven killed a woman in a holdup. When arrested, he was found surrounded by comic books. His twenty-year-old brother said, "If you want the cause of all this, here it is: It's those rotten comic books. Cut them out, and things like this wouldn't happen." (Of course, this brother was not an "expert"; he just knew the facts.)
- 4) An adolescent tortured a four-year-old boy, kicking him severely in the eye so that hospital treatment was necessary. Reason: "I just felt like doing it."
- 5) A seven-year-old girl broke into four homes and stole money, watches and jewelry.
- 6) A train was derailed by three boys, one of whom was eight, another ten.
- 7) A boy of thirteen committed a "lust murder" of a girl of six. After his arrest, in jail, he asked for comic books. "I refused, of course," said the sheriff.
- 8) A boy, who had participated when a group attacked and seriously stabbed another boy, was found with a knife which had a legend inked on the sheath: "KILL FOR THE LOVE OF KILLING."
- 9) A boy of twelve and his eight-year-old sister tried to kill a boy of six. They threatened to knock his teeth out, stabbed through his hands with a pocketknife, choked him, kicked him and jumped on him. The police captain said, "It is the worst beating I've ever seen, child or adult."
- 10) A ten-year-old boy hit a fourteen-month-old baby over the head with a brick, washed the blood off the brick and then threw the baby into the river.

- 11) A fourteen-year-old crime-comics addict killed a fourteen-year-old girl by stabbing her thirteen times with a knife. He did not know her.
- 12) Four boys, two of fourteen, one fifteen, one sixteen, carried out a comic-book classic. They beat the sixty-eight-year-old proprietor of a little candy store with a hammer and while he was lying on the floor one of the fourteen-year-olds drove a knife into his head with such force that the hilt was snapped off.
- 13) When a well-to-do surgeon received an extortion note demanding \$50,000 and threatening harm to his young daughter, experts deduced from the note that it was the work of an "adult male psychopath under emotional strain." It turned out to be a fourteen-year-old girl.
- 14) There have been whole series of cases where children threw rocks and bolts and fired air rifles at passing trains, and automobiles. One eleven-year-old boy who informed the police about this got such severe comic-book torture-by-fire from a group of boys that he had to have twenty-three skin grafting operations and twenty-six blood transfusions.
- 15) At the age of eleven, one boy attacked another with a switchblade knife. Later he organized a "shakedown racket," demanding money from children at knife point. If a boy resisted, the miniature racketeers would knock him down and their chief would stab him several times in the chest and back. At fifteen this boy instigated an attack on another boy. "The victim lay on the ground, beaten to a bloody pulp, and died." When they found no money on him, they stripped clothing from his body, while he lay in his death agonies.
- 16) A boy of eight who led three other boys in nine safe-cracking expeditions had bought himself a new pair of sneakers after one job so the detectives could not trace his footprints.

- 17) Typical story: a fourteen-year-old boy shot a policeman with a shotgun.
- 18) While their parents were away, two boys, nine and eleven, hit their little sister (two years and eight months old) with a hoe handle and trampled her to death.
- 19) In one city within a few months there were five separate instances where very young children were tortured by boys from five to eight years old in comic-book fashion: a four-month-old had a rope tied around his neck and pulled tight until he was unconscious and his face was pierced with safety pins in several places; a little girl was found by a truck driver unconscious and bleeding, being poked with sticks and kicked by a group of young boys.
- 20) Two fourteen-year-old girls robbed a taxidriver while he was stopped for a traffic light. One of them pressed a knife into his back and demanded his money. Then the other grabbed the ignition key from the dashboard and both fled.
- 21) A boy of eleven poured kerosene over a boy of eight and a girl of twelve. He lighted the kerosene with a paper torch and burned the children to death.
- 22) A nine-year-old boy killed a five-year-old girl by stabbing her more than one hundred times.

Let us also lift the lid a little bit to show what is going on in some schools:

In a public school heroin is sold on the premises. (It also was sold on the grounds of a psychiatric hospital where juvenile drug addicts are detained to cure them of their drug addiction.) In two other schools, police officers circulate on the grounds and in the corridors to prevent violence. A mathematics teacher in still another school who had to give an examination needed a policeman present in the classroom to guard her. In several schools, pupils threatened younger ones with beating and maim-

ing them, collecting money from them either once or regularly and taking their watches and fountain pens. Often the young victims do not dare to tell the names of their tormentors. In one such school when two victims were asked by the teacher they refused to answer, saying, "We don't want our eyes cut out!" In this particular school, one boy was beaten with a broken bottle from behind and cut so severely that seven stitches had to be taken around his eyes.

In still another school, a fourteen-year-old girl pupil was actually raped during the lunch recess in one of the corridors on the sixth floor. In a girl's school, a woman teacher was attacked and beaten by six girls aged twelve to fourteen. Police and radio cars had to speed to another school where two thirteen-year-old pupils attacked a teacher, one with a long stick and another with a picture taken down from the wall.

A regular race riot occurred in a metropolitan school. One teacher was punched in the eye, a police officer was struck and scratched. A police detail had to be sent to keep order in the building and the neighborhood. There are schools where one out of every five boys has been in Children's Court. To several high schools detectives have been sent disguised as porters or pupils to check drug addiction and/or violence. Wire-tapping equipment has been installed by police in school buildings.

In a letter to *Time* magazine (1953), James A. Michener, the well-known author, draws attention to a school where women teachers always try to stay near the door. Otherwise, as one of them put it, "the big boys might trap her in a corner and beat hell out of her." In a junior high school known to me, women teachers do not dare to go on the staircase alone for fear of being attacked or robbed by pupils. A policeman is permanently assigned on duty in this school. When questioned about his easy assignment, he answered, "Sometimes it gets real rough!"

In one school a pupil always functions as a monitor and is stationed next to a toilet. A teacher questioned about this routine answered that she did not know whether the monitor is

supposed to suppress violence, sex acts, vandalism or drug addiction. The type of vandalism that occurs is exemplified by the high school where children ripped out a toilet and threw it out of the window.

A thirteen-year-old boy stabbed an attractive young woman teacher eight times in the back and again in the face when she had fallen to the floor. Authorities were bewildered by the behavior of this boy, who came from a good home background.

I could continue this list almost indefinitely. There is nothing in these "juvenile delinquencies" that is not described or told about in comic books. These are comic-book plots. In comic books, usually these crimes remain unpunished until the criminal has committed many more of them. Children are not so lucky. They face severe punishments whenever they are caught. Educated on comic books, they go on to a long postgraduate course in jails (with the same reading-matter). To every one of these acts correspond dozens of lesser ones, hundreds of minor ones and thousands of fantasies.

Up to the beginning of the comic-book era there were hardly any serious crimes such as murder by children under twelve. Yet there was a world war and a long depression. So we adults who permit comic books are accessories. Speaking of just such crimes, however, a Municipal Court judge defends crime comics in *Parents' Magazine* with these three standard hypocritical arguments: "First of all, censorship would be worse"; "second, there is danger in overprotecting our children"; third, "violence and brutality are a part of the pattern of our lives."

It is becoming more and more apparent that what all delinquent children have in common is unprotectedness. I have found in every delinquent child that at one time or another he had insufficient protection. That implies not only material things, but social and psychological influences. Of course children get hurt at home and by their parents. But the time when children in the mass are most defenseless, when they are most

susceptible to influences from society at large, is in their leisure hours. And children's leisure is on the market.

Nobody knows exactly how many juveniles under twenty-one commit murder in the United States. But it is two or three a day. According to Federal statistics in 1948, about one in every eight persons arrested was a minor. The Federal Government does not have accurate statistics as to the number of homicides committed by children in the pre-adolescent and pre-teen group.

How unprotected children are is shown by the glib use of the word *teen-ager* in talk about juvenile delinquency, putting into one category such different age groups as that of a boy of thirteen and that of a young man of nineteen. One of the best-informed members of the judiciary, Judge Samuel Leibowitz, pointed out in a paper on "Crime and the Community" that "the defendants in crimes of violence in recent years are getting younger and younger, and nowadays they include mere children who should be in knee pants—at the age when in former years they would have come into contact with the law only for swiping apples or upsetting pushcarts."

A New York magistrate stated in open court that "it is fantastic the way mere children are being brought into court." After having published over the years innumerable optimistic handouts from interested public and private agencies, the *New York Times* said in 1953: "It is difficult to think of children as burglars, gangsters, drug addicts or murderers. Such has become the reality, however."

Juvenile delinquency is not a thing in itself. It can be studied only in relation to all kinds of other child behavior. And it is a mass phenomenon which cannot be fully comprehended with methods of individual psychology alone. Children do not become delinquents; they commit delinquencies. The delinquency of a child is not a disease; it is a symptom, individually and socially. You cannot understand or remedy a social phenomenon

like delinquency by redefining it simply as an individual emotional disorder.

It is on the basis of such an approach, however, that important mass influences on the child's mind have for years been completely overlooked. And it was precisely in this way that the comic-book industry could take over a large part of the time, the minds and the money of children from five to sixteen.

When I first made known the results of my studies about comic books, most people, including psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, psychologists, teachers and judges, had paid no attention to their effects on children. A billion times a year an American child sits down to pore over a comic book. What is the attraction? As late as 1951 a liberal magazine, *The Reporter*, carried an article on "The Comic Book Industry" in which it gave what it thought was the answer: Children are charmed by comic books because in them they can follow "the fortunes of cowhands and mice." That is how we deceive ourselves and others. "Cowhands" do occur in Western comics; but Western comics are mostly just crime comic books in a Western setting. Animal comics may feature "mice"; but animal comics are only a small part and are not habit-forming.

The average parent has no idea that every imaginable crime is described in detail in comic books. That is their main stock in trade. When questioned more closely even experts who have defended the industry did not know what an endless variety of crimes is described in detail in story after story, picture after picture. If one were to set out to show children how to steal, rob, lie, cheat, assault and break into houses, no better method could be devised. It is of course easy and natural for the child to translate these crimes into a minor key: stealing from a candy store instead of breaking into a bank; stabbing and hurting a little girl with a sharp pen if a knife is not handy; beating and threatening younger children, following the Superman formula of winning by force.

The way children transpose adult crime into their own sphere

is illustrated by the protection racket so often described in comic books, where small shopkeepers have to pay to gangsters to keep their shops from being damaged. At a Hookey Club session a fourteen-year-old boy said,

"There was one fellow, he was a friend of mine. He got the bright idea on the protection racket. He got it from crime comic books. I know he read them a lot. He used to say, 'You know what would be a good business? Making protection out of shoeshine boys.' He put that scheme into working. There are about twenty-five shoeshine boys in that district. He figured this would be the perfect setup. He used to make them pay a dollar a week and if they did not pay, their boxes or other equipment would be broken. He asked me to go in on it. I didn't because it was pretty cheap. He kept it up for several months. Two or three boys worked with him. One had a zip gun, the other had a stiletto. He was the chief, he had nothing. In other words, he was smart. If they caught him he would be empty-handed. He learned that from comic books, too. One of the boys who was paying protection told his mother. They went down to the station house and told the police the setup."

The contempt for law and police and the brutality of punishment in comic books is subconsciously translated by children into conflict with authority, and they develop a special indifference to it. Gerald, a boy of eleven, stole from stores with a group of older boys. One night after such an exploit two policemen followed them. Gerald had a B.B. gun, turned around and shot at one of the policemen. He was charged with armed robbery. When the whole group was in Children's Court the judge talked to them very seriously. Gerald told us all about that. "Didn't you feel strange in court?" he was asked. "No," he replied. "I read the comics and I feel I am used to it."

Taking into account every conceivable possibility, comic books present the details of how to commit crimes, how to conceal evidence, how to evade detection, how to hurt people. In a recent comic book which has the "Seal of Approval of Comics

Magazine Publishers," and is sold in New York subways, you learn that after a robbery you can escape more easily if you shoot out the source of light; you learn how to trade in guns; how to hijack ammunition; how to impersonate regular soldiers (I have had several cases of young people doing just that); and, of course, how to torture and kill a "squealer."

Anyone who has studied many truancy cases knows that children are tempted to use medical alibis. I know some who got the idea and even the methods of execution by transposing into their own childhood setting the lessons of comic books. In one which has the "Seal of Approval of Comics Magazine Publishers" young men fake disease to get out of the army. Coming out, as it did, during the Korean War, this lesson was directly useful to upper teen-agers and indirectly to schoolboys.

"Didn't I bluff my way out of the army?" says the hero-criminal. "Got a medical discharge without having anything wrong except indigestion! If you work it right, no doctor in the world can prove you're bluffing!"

A comic book appropriately entitled *The Perfect Crime* describes "an old and nearly foolproof scheme" to be worked on drugstores. You select one where the owner works alone, telephone him and ask him to deliver something for an emergency case. While he is out you rob his store.

"Pickin' a name from the phone book of somebody who lives in the neighborhood puts real class into this little gimmick! Hah!"

Variations of this theme are also described in comic books and of course quite often enacted in real life. In a case I am familiar with, a young man called a store to ask them please to stay open a little longer so he could buy something. Then he came late, when there was only one man in the store, and held it up.

One Western comic gives an illustrated lesson in foul fighting (he "chopped a powerful rabbit punch") and brutality (he "rammed his knee into Mossman's face with a sickening thud")

and then, when his victim was on the ground, kicked him in the face).

One story gives a price list for hurting people in the protection racket:

EYES BLACKED	\$ 4.00
ARM OR LEG BROKEN	10.00
WHOLE JOB	100.00 up

Another comic book shows how a youngster can murder for profit. He gets a job as a caddy, loses the ball, then kills the player when he goes searching for it.

Many comic books describe how to set fires, by methods too various to enumerate. In some stories fire-setting is related just as a detail; in other stories such as "The Arson Racket" the lesson is more systematic. There are other sidelights, like how to break windows so you cannot be found out; all this highlighted by the philosophy of the character who says: "From now on—I'm making dough the easy way—with a gun—! Only SAPS work!" That lesson, incidentally, is true of crime comics as a whole: glamour for crime, contempt for work.

"Fixing" of sporting events has recently been front-page news. I have one accused boy under psychotherapy right now. In comic books that is old stuff: "Here's 500 now, and you'll get 500 when it's over!"

Of course playing hookey from school is one of the smart things described by comic-book characters:

"But we better hurry or we'll be late for school!"

"Aw, the heck with school, Harvey! I'm not goin' today. Brains will never get you any place. It's MUSCLES that'll do it! Look at the easy duce-spot [sic] it made me just now!"

So varied are "the fortunes of cowhands and mice!"

In the spring of 1951 a teen-ager driving a stolen car tried to run down a policeman who had stepped out of his radio car to arrest him. People wondered at such cold-blooded brutality. How can a young boy get such an idea? For comics readers this

is a lesson of the elementary grades, described and illustrated over and over again.

Junior may be too young to wish to forge checks, but many children whom I have seen have forged their parents' signatures for school purposes. Forgery is, of course, also described in comic books. The preferred method is to pick up a blotter which has been used and copy the signature with the aid of a mirror.

Stealing of automobiles has become a great nuisance. Any young boy who succumbs to temptation in this direction, although he may have been brought up not to do it, has seen in detail just how to go about it. Comic books describe it often and fully, from incidental thefts to the "hot-car racket."

From one book you can learn how to cut through the glass and break into a store and how to stop the noise when you do break in: "Pile the blankets on to smother the noise!"

In countless books, it is brought home that it is wrong *not* to kill—because the victim may tell. Nothing is overlooked in these crime comics, however mean. One book shows how to steal the money box from the blind man who runs the newsstand. Of course, as in the vast majority of criminal acts depicted in comic books, this particular act is successful and not punished.

The very title of some stories makes it clear that there is a lesson in the story, and what the lesson is. For example: "Lessons For Larceny," with a sub-title, "Watch for Trouble when a Swindle Backfires."

I have seen many children, delinquent and not so delinquent, who kept their school report cards or absence notices from their parents. Comic books give visual aid about "the mailbox angle" used for stealing checks. In an apartment house "with self-service elevators" you let the elevator go to another floor. But how to get the letter out of the mailbox? "Yeah! It's coming out! This pencil and gum did the trick!" I have seen several children who did exactly that—taking mail from their parents' mailbox—and who had learned it from this source.

Many comic books explain in word and picture how to throw knives. In fact, I have learned from them quite a bit about the tricks of it myself. And lest the child might think—as naively as the adult public which permits all this—that the stories are just stories, not applicable in the next neighborhood gang fight, millions of comic books have illustrated advertisements:

THROWING KNIFE. Properly shaped and balanced for throwing . . . Penetrating point . . . Tool Steel . . . Thrilling stunts . . . Hard hitting . . . Easy-to-throw . . . 7 inches . . . (\$1.98)

Children who have thrown such knives have got into serious trouble. The adults who advertise them, supply them and show how to use them have not in a single instance been charged even with contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

In the comic-book syllabus stealing of every variety is amply covered. A man's pocketbook is stolen on the subway. Millions of little boys learn how to do that: "Did someone shove a newspaper in your face? And were you shoved from the rear at the same time? I can see that's what happened. The pickpocket got it while you were upset by the shove." Lesson completed.

How to steal a woman's pocketbook is outlined, too. According to the stories it may be done skilfully and peacefully, but if that does not work, just hit them over the head. This sort of thing has been done by a number of children.

In some comic books it is shown how the youngest tots are picked up bodily, held upside down and shaken so that the coins will fall out of their pockets. Not only do I know from boys that they have practiced this, but similar cases have been reported, like the one where children invaded a settlement house, stabbed one of the workers, smashed equipment and "turned boys upside down to get the pennies from their pockets."

Often comic books describe real crimes that have been featured in the newspapers. In adapting them for children the

following points are stressed: the daring and success of the criminals is exalted; brutal acts are shown in detail; sordid details are emphasized; if there are any sexual episodes they are featured. In 1952 three men escaped from a penitentiary. They stole cars, evaded the police, kidnaped people, held up a bank, and were finally caught in New York where they were living with three girls. A real children's story! In the first picture there is an unmade bed, a half-nude man and a girl. The prison break is described like a heroic feat. The ease with which you can steal cars in the country from a farmer is pointed out to youngsters who do not know that yet. One of the criminals boasts to a little boy that he has killed fifteen or sixteen people, "I lost count."

The girls living with the criminals are featured, two of them hiding behind a shower curtain. There are seventy-six pictures of exploits; in the seventy-seventh picture the police take over with a cheap wisecrack.

All this is only a small sample from my collection and an infinitesimal part of the whole story. Juvenile delinquency is not just a prank nor an "emotional illness." The modern and more serious forms of delinquency involve knowledge of technique. By showing the technique, comic books also suggest the content. The moral lesson is that "innocence doesn't pay."

If it were the aim of adults to tempt children as persistently, as clearly and as graphically as possible, they would have to invent the comic-book industry. When I first announced my findings that these comic books are primers for crime, I was greeted with these arguments:

- 1) It is not true. Only the rarest comic book does that.
- 2) It is not true any more, though it may have been true in the past. Now that is all changed.
- 3) If true, it was always thus.
- 4) Crime comic books have no effect at all on children's behavior.

- 5) Crime comic books are a major force in preventing juvenile delinquency.
- 6) Crime comic books are not read by children, but only by adults.
- 7) Comic books affect only "emotionally unstable" or "insecure" children and not the average child.

All these arguments have influenced the public. That they are self-contradictory was evidently overlooked or forgiven.

What is the relationship of crime comic books to juvenile delinquency? If they would prevent juvenile delinquency, there would be very little of it left. And if they were the outlet for children's primitive aggressions, this would be a generation of very subdued and controlled children.

Our researches have proved that there is a significant correlation between crime-comics reading and the more serious forms of juvenile delinquency. Many children read only few comics, read them for only a short time, read the better type (to the extent that there is a better type) and do not become imbued with the whole crime-comics atmosphere. Those children, on the other hand, who commit the more serious types of delinquency nowadays, read a lot of comic books, go in for the worst type of crime comics, read them for a long time and live in thought in the crime-comics world. The whole publicity-stunt claim that crime comics prevent juvenile delinquency is a hoax. I have not seen a single crime comic book that would have any such effect, nor have I ever seen a child or young adult who felt that he had been prevented from anything wrong by a comic book. Supposing you wanted to prevent promiscuous, illegitimate sexual relations, would you publish millions of books showing in detail where and how the man picks up the girl, where they go, the details of their relationships in bed and then how the next morning somebody breaks into their room and tosses them out of bed? A comic-book defender would say this teaches that "Sex does not pay."

The role of comic books in delinquency is not the whole nor by any means the worst harm they do to children. It is just one part of it. Many children who never become delinquent or conspicuously disturbed have been adversely affected by them. Pouring sordid stories into the minds of children is not the same as pouring water over a duck's back. One would think that this would be the most elementary lesson in child guidance. But child experts have overlooked this for years without really studying children's comic-book reading.

How can a doctor discover that a man's diet is a contributing factor to his illness when he omits to ask the man what he eats, approves of what he is eating (without looking into what it really is) and does not know what these foodstuffs contain? This type of guidance has been practiced on children for years.

In 1951, *Harper's* magazine, in a piece attempting to refute my comic-book conclusions, quoted triumphantly the statement of a judge that he "never came across a single case where the delinquent or criminal act would be attributable to the reading of comic books." Should not such a statement carry tremendous weight in my investigations? How could I disregard it if I wanted to be thoroughly scientific?

So I did look into it. I checked. How many juvenile delinquents had come into this judge's court, altogether? *One single case!* Could he really defend the millions of crime comic books as they are? He had this to say, "I am firmly convinced that children should not be permitted to read the more lurid type of comic magazines, those which portray crime, violence, killing and sex situations. I am opposed to those books which are sadistic in tone. An unrelieved diet of violence and crime can do no good even to those children who are well-adjusted. Some children might readily obtain ideas of violence from comic books. Many children lack in maturity and judgment to control their actions after reading such books."

What about this judge's probation department? One of his chief probation officers was asked whether they ever inquired

of any defendant about his comic-book reading. He replied, "The subject played no part in our thinking of any great consequence, any more than the reading of the average run of publications such as *Life*."

Superintendents of reformatories also made the "not a single case" statement. What about them? Not only do their records show that they made no examination in this respect, but some institutions are filled to the brim with the worst kind of comic books which keep the inmates occupied and quiet.

Comic-book reading in child-care institutions and reformatories is particularly harmful because these children are so restrained otherwise. Superintendents may not take official cognizance of it, or may have the illusion that only *Donald Duck* and *Mickey Mouse* are available in their particular institutions. A boy of thirteen was brought to me. He had just spent two years in a model reformatorylike institution. (Reformatories do not like the name *reformatory*, but they cling to reformatory methods.) This boy had got into trouble for stealing. He was a great comics reader, but in the reformatory "they would not allow the murder and mystery ones." The boy himself told me that the real practice was somewhat different from the rule. Reading crime comic books was "the only fun" he had had while in the institution.

Crime comics are certainly not the only factor, nor in many cases are they even the most important one, but there can be no doubt that they are the most unnecessary and least excusable one. In many cases, in conjunction with other factors, they are the chief one.

Edith was a delinquent girl of fourteen. Over the years the family had had contact with some twenty-five social agencies. It was a history of illness, vocational dislocation, disruption and financial difficulties. The girl, good-looking and anxious to get help, had serious aspirations to make something of her life.

Surely in such a case one cannot disregard the social condi-

tions, nor can one ascribe delinquency directly to them. One must search for the particular in the general, the individual in the social, and vice versa. There is no such thing as abstract frustration leading to abstract aggression.

What goes on in the mind of such a girl? Where does the rationalization come from that permits her to act against her better impulses? Her ideal was Wonder Woman. Here was a morbid model in action. For years her reading had consisted of comic books. There was no question but that this girl lived under difficult social circumstances. But she was prevented from rising above them by the specific corruption of her character development by comic-book seduction. The woman in her had succumbed to Wonder Woman. By reading many comic books the decent but tempted child has the moral props taken from under him. The antisocial suggestions from comic books reach children in their leisure time, when they are alone, when their defenses are down.

An official psychiatric report on a nine-year-old delinquent had summed up the situation as follows: "It is felt that the mother is neurotic and has been unable to afford Alfred the needed depth of feeling required for him to achieve a firm personality structure." This is the typical high-sounding double-talk so widely employed these days with regard to troubled children. I saw his much harassed mother, who had been fighting a losing battle to protect her son from bad influences on the street and in the crime comics. What had society given him to provide him with a "firm personality structure"? Crime comics in an endless stream.

Judge Jacob Panken has observed three separate cases where children got hold of lighter fluid, saturated another child with it and set him afire. He found in these three instances that these children, coming from different boroughs, favored a particular comic book which has on its cover a burning human being in flames. He felt that in each instance the comic book shared the

responsibility, that "it is the straw which breaks the camel's back."

A fifteen-year-old boy was accused of having shot and killed a boy of fourteen (the authorities chose to consider this accidental), of having thrown a cat from a roof, of having thrown a knife through a boy's foot, of sadistic acts with younger children, of having shot at a younger girl with a B.B. gun. After a full study of the psychological and social background, we came to the conclusion that the fact that he was an inveterate reader of comic books was an important contributing factor. His favorite comic book, read over and over, contained no less than eighty-one violent acts, including nineteen murders.

Even if the Howard Lang case had been the only one—there were many others—it should have been enough to make adults take steps against crime comics. This thirteen-year-old boy killed seven-year-old Lonnie in a dreadful fashion. In a lonely wood he stabbed him many times with a pocket knife, choked him, stamped and jumped on him, and then dropped on his face—four times—heavy blocks of concrete. After this, with the help of another boy, he hid the still-living victim under a heap of leaves. Lonnie lived another twelve to fourteen hours before finally dying in agony. The judge in the case, Judge Daniel A. Roberts, commented especially on the influence of crime comic books on Howard. He took judicial notice of twenty-six of the boy's comic books and stated that they showed "the homicidal, near-homicidal and brutal attacks upon the persons of the characters depicted by means of knives, guns, poison, arrows and darts, rocks off cliffs, etc." "It was testified," he went on, "that the defendant had observed or read these comic books since before he could actually read." Judge Roberts further characterized these comic books as "startling in the extreme, and nauseating and degrading to the moral sense. That these publications are permitted to be sold to the youth of the country is a travesty upon the country's good sense. The crime and horror comics are extremely ugly in appearance, caused by their creators' diabolic

twist of mind . . . sordid killings and gruesome plottings . . . something must be done . . . by law if the publishers will not properly censor their own work.”

Glenn R. Winters, editor of the *Journal of the American Judicature Society*, a leading publication on jurisprudence, commented on Judge Roberts’s observation that it “may be verified by an examination of practically any copy of any of the magazines.” Mr. Winters further wrote in this connection that people are entitled to the cherished right to believe that comic books “had nothing whatever to do with making a potential murderer out of Howard Lang and that he would have been as likely to go the same way on a literary diet of *The Bobbsey Twins* and *Pilgrim’s Progress*, but millions of American parents deeply concerned about surrounding their children with proper influences will not be so convinced.”

At the retrial of the case Judge John A. Sbarbaro also referred specifically to the bad influence of comic books. The judge said, that in his opinion: “After much consideration of this evidence the Court feels it to be his duty to make certain specific suggestions for much needed legislation . . . regulatory statutes restricting publication and distribution of harmful features of so-called comic books.”

Despite all this, little Lonnie seems to have been forgotten and his horrible comic-book death has been in vain.

A very experienced youth counsellor in the course of group therapy in an institution asked two groups of delinquent boys whether and what they had learned about delinquency from comic books. From the first group, composed of nine boys from thirteen to fifteen, everyone said that he had received helpful suggestions from comic books:

- 1) Now listen to this. If you see a bathroom window lit up you know someone is at home. If it’s still lit next day, no one is at home. They leave the key in the mailbox, under mats or in corners. If you see a milk bottle and a note in

it, the note gives you a pretty good idea of the house. If you keep up with the notes, you know everything.

“Another thing: after a bride and groom get married they have a lot of presents they keep in the house, so the only thing you have to do is get two tickets to a show like *Oklahoma*, cost about \$5.50 apiece. You send them to the bride and groom and they’re pretty sure to go. On most tickets they have a date, so that you know when they go. When they’re gone, you go in and take your time and help yourself.

“As smart as I am, I never thought of this. I got it all from the comics.”

- 2) “I got my bad ideas from the comics, stabbing, robbing, stealing guns and all that stuff. In a comic book I read two kids rob a store and steal guns and get away and grow up to be bank robbers. So I did the same thing—only I didn’t grow up to be a bank robber—yet!”
- 3) “I read about a perfect robbery and used parts of it. This was in a crime comic magazine and it said these three men were still at large and didn’t get caught, so I figured I could pull the same stuff.”

The second group was made up of ten boys, twelve to sixteen. Except for one boy, all described the delinquency lessons of comic books:

- 1) “In the comics I saw a cat kicked by a man so I kicked the cat because I saw it happen that way.”
- 2) “I saw how to carry a gun in a suitcase and a shopping bag. If I ever had to do it, that’s the way I’d do it.”
- 3) “I learned how to break a seal off a freight car from the comics and how to put on another so you don’t get caught.”
- 4) “I learned how to rob cars from the comics. They tell you, if the door’s open, how to switch wires.”
- 5) “I got this from the comics. The patrolman would make

his beat. We'd find out what time he goes past and back. We saw how they take a strip from a window and take out the window, and we did the same. Another idea we got was taping the windows and cracking them. Then you take the tape off and pick the glass out. When a train goes past, like the Third Avenue El, we'd crack the window with our fist. We got all this from comics."

Some members of the Hookey Club described some of their delinquencies which had not been found out. One boy told how he had snatched purses from women. "In the comic books it shows how to snatch purses. You should read them if you got the time [To me.]. It shows a boy going to a woman and asking her where the church is. She naturally drops her arm and goes waving. So you just grab the purse and run. Usually they can't run after you. She has the bag in her hand, waving to a certain place. You just grab her arm. It was in different comic books. They all build that stuff up. You pick desolate places, where nobody is around." If such delinquent fantasies are stirred in hundreds of thousands of children, it is inevitable that some of them will carry out their fantasies in fact.

There is no doubt that the impulse to commit a delinquent act is important. What counteracts the impulse, however, is equally important. In the children I have studied, I have endeavored to determine what perspective of life the child had and what it came from. Children, like adults, are impelled in different directions, good or bad. It is up to us to determine the factors which in the individual case tip the scales. To disregard the comic-book factor is unfair to children, particularly in the light of the severe punishments they so often receive, after they have become delinquent. A little attention beforehand would do away with a lot of detention afterwards.

“I Want to Be a Sex Maniac!”

*Comic Books and the Psycho-Sexual
Development of Children*

*“Give me good proofs of what you have alleged;
'Tis not enough to say—in such a bush
There lies a thief.”*

—Shakespeare

A small boy who had made ample use of the reading and entertainment we provide so plentifully for children was once asked what he wanted to be when he grew up. His instant reply was enthusiastic: "I want to be a sex maniac!"

To describe the morbid aspects of sex as purveyed in stories which have no artistic justification may sound obscene. But it can hardly be objected to in this book for adults since it is the common subject matter of what we give children to read.

Does comic-book reading influence the sexual development of children? The question of sex education has been much discussed. Some preach almost unlimited openness and frankness, even at an early age. Others feel sex education must proceed very slowly, that it is best to begin with the birds and flowers. No correct answers can be given to such questions as, Should sex instruction be given at home or in the school? because the questions are wrong. Children get it anyhow, and in both places. The problem is that what they get is so often wrong instruction. And even if nothing is said about sex, that is a form of sex instruction too. The greatest error is to think of sexual problems in isolation. They are part of life. They influence other aspects of life and are in turn themselves influenced.

One starting-point for a discussion of sex education should be the fact that sex in its subtle and crude aspects often causes a great deal of mental anguish to children. They could often be spared such painful preoccupations, worries, inferiority feelings and guilt complexes as frequently occupy them. Education has not only the positive aspect of imparting knowledge, but also the preventative aspect of warding off harmful influences. If harmful influences are widespread in the population, a formal course of sex instruction, separated from everything else, can achieve little.

Pre-adolescence and adolescence are manifestly the most difficult periods in children's sexual development. This is so not only on account of the maturing of the sexual instinct, as is commonly supposed, but also because of the awakening of

social feelings at that time. All human beings have to learn a rationale of controlling, disciplining and, if you will, sublimating sexual impulses. Only a decent social orientation can lead to a decent sex life, for practically all psychological sex problems are ethical problems. In sexual education as in other education, one should also not forget that we are bringing children up not to be children, but to be adults.

Contrary to the opinion of unprogressive progressive educationalists, children *like* to be guided. When we adults disappoint them by not giving them any worthy models to follow, we theorize that children resent authority. They do not. Actually they have a natural need to be led and directed.

With the progress of scientific research, a road on which the names of Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis, Freud, Stekel and Kinsey are signposts, we have learned more and more that sexual behavior varies widely and that many patterns which used to be regarded as serious crimes, extremely immoral conduct or severe abnormalities do not deserve to be so seriously regarded. And yet education for a happy life must take into account that sexual irregularities in one way or another may spell great unhappiness and suffering. A liberal-minded attitude appropriate in dealing with fully grown adults is unfair when used as an excuse for not warding off harmful influences from children.

Comic books stimulate children sexually. That is an elementary fact of my research. In comic books over and over again, in pictures and text, and in the advertisements as well, attention is drawn to sexual characteristics and to sexual actions. As one boy expressed it to me when I was discussing with a group what is good and bad in comics, "The sexism is bad, but to tell you the truth, I like that most!" There are children—and very young ones, too, according to our researches—who get stirred up by this "sexism." That is not the free development of children, that is a sexual arousal which amounts to seduction.

One might speculate that children in good circumstances with strict ethical education would be immune against such

temptation and seduction. But that is a naive and amateurish view although the comic-book industry has been able through its scientific spokesmen to put it over on the public. We studied, for example, comics reading in 355 children, boys and girls, from a parochial school. In this school ethical teaching played a large part and all the children had undergone this uniform influence. Economically, they came from better than average homes. Their grades ranged from 5B through 8B. Their identity was fully protected so that they felt completely free to express their real opinions.

The authorities of the school, who were very co-operative and interested, had opinions about comic books that differed from mine. They assumed that their children do not read the "bad" ones and that comic books were getting better and better, with fewer bad ones and those bad ones improving. They thought that if their children should see bad comics, their moral training and teaching would prevent them from reading them.

Our findings, based entirely on what the children themselves said, showed that, like most other adults, the school authorities had misjudged the comic-book situation, and that under their very eyes many of these children are being seduced by the industry. A large number "read" comic books from the age of four or four and a half, long before school age. Many know and read the "bad" comic books which we had found to be the most disturbing to ethical development. They named as "bad ones": *Crime Does Not Pay*, *Mr. District Attorney*, horror comics like *Vault of Horror*, *Superman*, *Jungle Comics*, crime, murder and mystery comics, *Crimebusters*, *Captain Marvel*, *Western Comics*, *Classics*, *Tales of the Crypt*, *True Love*.

Their comments are revealing. One boy said about *Superman*, "It teaches 'crime does not pay'—but it teaches crime." Another said, "Superman is bad because they make him sort of a God." Still another, "Superman is bad because if the children believe Superman they will believe 'most anything.'"

A ten-year-old said, "I think they're bad, but good to read!" What they mean by "bad" is interesting. One boy said, "Some are dirty, some give you bad thoughts." This was a common comment. A number of the children include love comics among "bad ones," thereby expressing much better ethical judgment than their elders.

Quite a few of the children indicated plainly that comic books affect them sexually. Many used the expression of a ten-year-old who said, "Some comic books lead us into sin." They used such phrases as "impure dress," "some have no clothes on," "indecent," "naked," "they are not modest." Many children have received a false concept of "love," thinking of it as something "dirty." They lump together "love, murder and robbery."

From comic books these children get just the opposite of what they learn at school or at home. They are taught, "Lead me not into temptation," but temptation in the form of comic books is offered them everywhere. Even if the ethical teaching they get should prevail, we place on them the burden of an intense emotional, moral conflict. An eleven-year-old jungle-book reader said that "comic books are very exciting and very bad and dirty." How is a child to distinguish between the excitement approved by the Child Study Association of America as good for children and the bad thoughts not approved by the parochial school?

Since I have written about comic books I have heard from quite a number of young adults who told me that their childhood emotional masturbation problem was started or aggravated by comic books. This has been borne out by our studies of children. Masturbation is harmless enough. But when accompanied by unhealthy—especially sado-masochistic—fantasies it may become a serious factor in the maladjustment of children. When I have presented my findings for discussion, I have often been told that children who had such comic-book sex fantasies were not at all harmed by them. But is it not one of the elementary facts of modern psychopathology that childhood experi-

ences very often do not manifest themselves as recognizable symptoms or behavior patterns in childhood, but may crop up later in adult life as perverse and neurotic tendencies?

One of the stock mental aphrodisiacs in comic books is to draw girls' breasts in such a way that they are sexually exciting. Wherever possible they protrude and obtrude. Or girls are shown in slacks or negligees with their pubic regions indicated with special care and suggestiveness. Many children miss that, but very many do not. In other run-of-the-mill comic books, as was first pointed out to me by adolescents who collected them, special emphasis is given in whole series of illustrations to girls' buttocks. This is a kind of fetichism and in some individuals leads to rigid fetichistic tendencies either in fantasy or in actual life later. Such preoccupations, as we know from psychoanalytic and Rorschach studies, may have a relationship also to early homosexual attitudes.

At some of the sessions of the Hookey Club, when there were only adolescent boys present, no younger ones and no girls, discussions about comic books were sometimes pretty outspoken. One boy discussed the comic book, *Crimes by Women*. "There is one that is sexy! Her legs are showing above her knees and her headlights are showing *plenty!* She has a smoking gun in her hand as though she had already shot somebody. When you see a girl and you see her headlights and she is beaten up, that makes you hot and bothered! If she will take a beating from a man she will take anything from him." Another boy defended *Crimes by Women* and showed a copy of *Penalty* which he said was worse. "It shows how to commit burglaries, holdups. A gangster has a hand on a girl's shoulder. He is working his way down to her headlights."

The keynote of the comic books' sexual message, drummed into children from a tender age on, is the admixture of sensuality with cruelty. The illustrations are, as the *Art Digest* called them, "perverted." It is a special perversion that they cultivate most of all, sadism. Sadism is defined as "the gratification of

sexual feeling by the infliction of or sight of pain" (William White).

In very young children comic books set up confusion and create a sadistic interpretation of sex. Ronnie, a six-year-old comic-book addict attending the Clinic, often played with a boy a year or so older who lived downstairs in the same house. One day this playmate took a little girl and Ronnie into his room and proceeded to take off the girl's clothes. Ronnie watched a bit, then ran upstairs excitedly, told his mother all about what he had seen and asked her, "What's he going to do to her—choke her?"

The short circuit which connects violence with sex is a primitive pattern slumbering in all people. It can easily be released in children if it is drilled into them early enough and long enough. It is to these primitive layers of the undeveloped mind, to this weak spot, that comic books appeal. The stories and pictures arouse vague yearnings and suggest ways in which sadism can be practiced or daydreamed about. Children transpose sadism into their own sphere. A fifteen-year-old boy who for a considerable time was given psychotherapy at the Clinic used to speed close to girls on his bicycle. Then he would stretch out his arm suddenly and hit them on the breast.

Running over a young girl on the sidewalk is described in a comic book. John, a boy of nine, put this sequence into practice, and deliberately knocked over a girl with his bicycle. He told me about it, "I got a thrill out of it—a thrilling sensation . . ."

Graphic description of sexual flagellation on the buttocks is frowned upon by the Post Office—if it occurs in adult books. But in a typical comic book for children such erotic scenes are described in detail. The villain (a foreigner, of course) has the half-nude girl in his power. As an appetizer, she is hit in the face. Then: "I know that you shall love me and shall be loyal after you have taken a dozen or so lashes across your beautiful back!"

She is taken to the cellar, bound by the wrists to a tall post,

her breasts conspicuously drawn, and pleads for mercy. The man stands behind her with a coiled whip in hand.

In Western comic books, the erotic spanking of a girl by a man is frankly featured. Beatings with a sexual connotation occur in many comic books.

A boy of twelve was brought to me a while ago because "he forced his sister to get undressed and tried to have sex relations with her." The sister was nine years old. Such occurrences are less rare than is generally assumed. And frequently one can straighten out a child like this if one diagnoses the whole situation. After I had seen this boy a number of times, he told me about it spontaneously. He said he had threatened to break his sister's arm if she told anybody. This is not the kind of thing that boys used to tell their little sisters. To break people's arms, or to threaten to do so, is one of the comic-book devices. It is even represented on comic covers.

If a medical student had to write a paper for his psychopathology class on the varieties of sadistic fantasies and sadistic acts, he could cover the whole field by studying just what is in our children's comics. In a comic book, typically full of blood, violence and nudity, the erotic hanging theme is exploited. The average reader, of a generation not brought up on comics, may not realize the connection between sex and hanging, with one of the typical perverse fantasies for wishing to hang an undressed girl and watch her struggles. But this is made abundantly clear to children in their daily reading matter. In one story a man "kills for sport." There is a sequence with illustrations of half-nude girls where he makes this comment:

"Ho-Ho! What a hangman I make! The police are blundering fools! But I am an artist!"

"My noose will fit around that pretty's neck!"

In the next picture the blonde girl, clad in a noose, a bra and Bikini trunks is hanging from a tree. And you see her again, hanging "in a death struggle."

There are individuals who suffer from the truly dangerous

perversion of wishing to hurt or kill couples making love to each other. The comic-book industry obliges by describing such cases in detail. So, the child who had never had such an idea before will learn it; the one who had any idea at all, however faintly, will have it nourished and given form. One picture shows a couple in an automobile, both the young man and the girl with blood streaming all over their faces from bullet holes in their heads. In the story the murderer was never caught.

Some comic books describe sexual sadism with its most morbid psychological refinements. In a recent comic book a man makes love to a married woman, while her husband, whose leg has been injured by the lover, has to look helplessly on. The lover kisses the girl, taunting the husband all the while. The girl gets sexually so excited by this perverse situation that she exclaims: "stop! I can't stand it any more!"

Another morbid fantasy is the idea of drawing blood from a girl's veins in order to overpower her completely. Outside of the forbidden pages of Sade himself, you find this fully described and depicted only in children's comic books.

We have traced the effect of this seduction to sadism. Children's spontaneous drawings are one good indicator. In one such drawing, a girl is tied nude to a post. A handkerchief is stuffed into her mouth. On the floor are her discarded panties. In front of her is a boy heating some torture instruments over a fire. On his chest is the S of the superman.

Several young men who gloated over these sadistic comics stories as adolescents have told me that during sexual relations they have to rely on the fantasy that the girl is bound and tied down in one way or another.

Certain kinds of books and magazines of pornographic or semipornographic character for adults are called "high-heel" literature. This has to do with the erotic character that high heels have for certain men. Psychiatrists know that there are men who collect shoes with high heels, as a kind of fetich for erotic pleasure, and that other men have such fantasies as hav-

ing women with very high-heeled shoes step on them. In the ordinary comic book for children exaggeratedly high heels are introduced and appeal to these latent fetichistic tendencies. In one comic book with a story on "the man who shanghaied more than 1,000 men from the San Francisco docks," there is suddenly—unrelated to the story—an illustration showing large in the foreground only the lower part of a girl's legs, in net stockings and very high-heeled red shoes. The young boy who called my attention to this told me he and his friends got a kick out of it. This type of picture, showing only legs and extremely high heels—and interrupting a story of action to do so—is a repeated motif in different comic books. Several boys have told me that they collect these comics illustrations and use them for sexual fantasies, with or without masturbation.

A nineteen-year-old boy told me about his high-heel fantasies: "You are the first one I tell it to. I think of girls twisting their heels on my chest and face." His first complete sexual stimulation had come from masochistic scenes in comic books at the age of about ten or eleven. "This woman had a castle and in order to generate the electricity all the men had to push something. The women, who were glamorously dressed, would hit the men, who were in various stages of undress."

The average adult may not know much about the fact that there are men who are masochists and indulge in fantasies of a strong woman to whom they must act as slaves and who whips them if they do not carry out all her whims. Books for adults with detailed descriptions of sexual masochism and without artistic merit are considered pornographic. Masochism derives its name from the novelist Sacher Masoch who wrote such stories. Typical masochist fantasies that could be straight out of Sacher Masoch are offered to little boys and girls by the comic-book industry. In one story a baroness has two male slaves. They "obeyed her every whim while she lorded it over them with a savage tyranny!" The accompanying picture shows the baroness, whip in hand. She talks about forcing a man "to

come to me on his knees” and speaks of him as “my willing slave.” In one scene which might be from a case history by Krafft-Ebing you see her whipping a man who is crouched on the floor: “So! You dare to kiss me, do you, you dog? Take that! and that!”

Many years ago, as a postgraduate medical student, I listened to lectures on the psychopathology of sex. I did not think then that one day I would have so much difficulty in convincing people that what I learned there about sick adults was not the best reading matter for healthy children!

There are men who have a desire to see undressed girls tied to posts or with their hands bound behind their backs or above their heads, or confined in chains. Such deviations of psychosexual development usually have their origin in some early chance experience either seen, heard or read. American children are given every opportunity to develop these psychopathic tendencies.

A twelve-year-old sex delinquent told me, “In the comic books sometimes the men threaten the girls. They beat them with their hands. They tie them around to a chair and then they beat them. When I read such a book I get sexually excited. They don’t get me sexually excited all the time, only when they tie them up.” The difference between the surreptitious pornographic literature for adults and children’s comic books is this: in one it is a question of attracting perverts, in the other of making them.

There is a lot of loose and irresponsible talk about children’s sadistic reading being a help to them in getting rid of their aggression. I have yet to see a single adolescent who had sadistic fantasies and wishes and got rid of them by reading sadistic comic books. Nor have I found a single published case.

A group of Hookey Club boys from twelve to fifteen discussed what they thought was good and bad in comic books and spoke about “torture” as a bad feature. Most of them agreed they liked books showing it, though. I asked the boys whether

any of them, if they actually had a little girl in a lonely place, would really like to tie her up, beat her and torture her. I wondered whether any of them would admit to that and asked for a show of hands. Everybody smiled—and every hand went up. They had learned their comic-book lessons well. It is frequently overlooked that long before the age of puberty children may have very elaborate sexual fantasies which do them no good. The sexualized brutality of crime comic books leads not infrequently to a connection between the thrill of suspense and that of sexual arousal—a kind of anxiety stimulation. Sometimes this may go far enough to produce orgasm. “I think sex all boils down to anxiety,” one boy told me. In some cases, more often in girls but also in boys, this arousal is closely related to masochism.

There is a special kind of cruelty mixing crimes against property and sexual exploits which I have hardly ever encountered in juvenile cases before the comic-book era. Nowadays it is not at all uncommon.

A boy from a well-to-do family was referred to me for psychotherapy after he had become very inattentive in his studies. During treatment he told me once that he and three other boys, fifteen and sixteen years old, used to go to a candy store in the neighborhood where they ate ice-cream cones, bought comic books and talked big. One evening in one of the boy's parents' car they drove from the suburb where they lived to Broadway. There they picked up a young prostitute and took her to the home of one of the boys whose parents were away. Two of them had intercourse with her and various sexual experiments were tried out, the girl being very co-operative. They paid her five dollars each. After that, all four went out with her in the car to drive her back to Broadway as they had promised. On the way they had a bright idea. They stopped the car, pounced upon the girl and while one held her forcibly around the neck the others beat her unmercifully about the face and body. They went through her handbag and took out all her money. One

boy, hitting her in the face, said to her, "You are too independent!" The girl did not fight back. She just sat and cried and said it was not fair after she had been so nice to them. Then they left her at a subway station, with just enough money to pay her fare. This is comic-book stuff.

Comic books create sex fears of all kinds. In girls the identification of sex with violence and torture may cause fear of sex, fear of men and actual frigidity. A Western with a picture of Tom Mix on the cover has in one story no less than *sixteen consecutive* pictures of a girl tied up with ropes, her hands of course tied behind her back! She is shown in all kinds of poses, each more sexually suggestive than the other, and her facial expression shows that she seems to enjoy this treatment. Psychiatrically speaking, this is nothing but the masturbation fantasy of a sadist, and it has a corresponding effect on boys. For girls, and those boys who identify themselves with the girl, it may become the starting-point for masochistic fantasies.

Some of the ordinary comic books have illustrations revealing crude sexual details if you look at them in a certain way. The shoulder of a man with a red scarf around his neck shows a girl's nude body. This is so clear that it can induce the immature reader to look for such things and stir him up sexually.

Love comics do harm in the sphere of taste, esthetics, ethics and human relations. The plots are stereotyped, banal, cheap. Whereas in crime comics the situation is boy meets girl, boy beats girl; in love comics it is boy meets girl, boy cheats girl—or vice versa.

Adolescent girls are not helped by this bit from a love comic: "How long can a beautiful woman wait for love? Is it a crime to take passion where it is found—regardless of mocking faithfulness? (For the thrilling answer see page 17.)"

Love comics, like crime comics, play up the angle that what they depict is real life. "These girls are real people with real problems and real dramatic confessions," says a typical issue. What do these "real" girls want? "More than anything in the

world I wanted glamor, money, adventure . . ." What are their problems? The titles of the stories give the answer:

FALLEN WOMAN
RUNAWAY PASSION!
PRICE OF PRIDE
FORBIDDEN LOVE
MY FOOLISH MISTAKE!
MUST I REVEAL MY PAST?

In crime comics normal sexual life is repressed, whereas violence is shown in detail. In love comics it is just the reverse. Homicide is usually prevented at the last moment, while fornication is completed:

"Violent passions smouldered in my heart! I burned with love for a man who could never be mine. In a moment of weakness I surrendered to a tragic impulse and grasped at a forbidden love!"

Or: "Naive, innocent fool that I was, I thought he was asking me to marry him! But I found out different fifteen minutes after we checked into the hotel!! My folks hushed it up of course . . . and I learned to forget. . . ."

Or, again: "One moment of sin . . . The ugliest sin in the world . . . would it bring her a lifetime of happiness?" (sic!)

There are no good modern studies on childhood prostitution, although the case material for such a study is unfortunately not lacking. The whole subject is hushed up, just as juvenile drug addiction was until recently. Childhood prostitution is always due to neglect by the family (which often cannot help itself) and by social agencies. It is on the increase at present. Comic books do their share in laying the psychological groundwork.

Annie, aged ten, engaged in sex play with men for which she received money. Like most children she was very suggestible. From comic books she absorbed fantasies of violence and sex, but the few constructive things she saw, like the movie about Sister Kenny, stimulated her to the constructive fantasy of be-

coming a nurse. "I fooled around with men, young men and old men. They gave me a dollar. I don't have my period yet. They just took down my pants. I meet the men on the docks. They did it in a shady house, a house that has all kinds of tools in it—hammers. I went over there four times a week. I don't like it. Girls don't like it. I did it for the money. Sometimes I would get half a dollar, sometimes a quarter. Some men don't give you anything. Cheap, ain't they!"

This girl read about twenty comic books a day. Some of them she read over three or four times. After she saw the Sister Kenny movie she formed the ideal of becoming a nurse who "cures the people." But one good movie could not prevail over hundreds of comic books.

Other varieties follow the pattern of adult organized prostitution, except that the girls get younger and younger and sometimes the purveyors do, too. A girl of seventeen supplied school-girls of twelve to fourteen to middle-aged men. She had about twenty-five girls. The official investigation, which was far from thorough, estimated that at least fifty adult men were involved. The seventeen-year-old girl got \$1.50 to \$2.00 from each customer. But she gave the girls only a quarter or fifty cents.

There are quite a number of obscure stores where children congregate, often in back rooms, to read and buy secondhand comic books. The proprietors usually permit the children to spend a lot of time in their establishments and to pore over the comic books. In some parts of cities, men hang around these stores which sometimes are foci of childhood prostitution. Evidently comic books prepare the little girls well.

Homosexual childhood prostitution, especially in boys, is often associated with stealing and with violence. For all these activities children are softened up by comic books. Their super-ego formation with regard to sex is interfered with in a subtle way: everything is permitted to men in comic books and there is constant sex stimulation. Charles was studied at the Quaker Emergency Service Readjustment Center. At the age of twelve

he engaged in regular prostitution. He did not play hookey, but followed this occupation after school hours. He said, "I meet the men in office places or places of business. They give me a dollar or fifty cents. I wondered how they'd be so generous. Some men are about thirty-five." The outstanding feature in this boy's examination was his moral confusion. Comic books contributed to this. "I usually read comic books, *Gangbusters* or *True Comics*, about ten or fifteen a week, about two a day. I trade them."

More has been printed on the subject of homosexuality than on any other sexual phenomenon. This would indicate not only a preoccupation with the subject, but also that our understanding of it is still incomplete.

Comic books, like other books, can be read at different levels, with different people getting out of them different things. That does not depend only on differences in age; it is affected also by more subtle factors of constitution, experience, inclination and unconscious susceptibilities. To determine them, I have let children draw, write and make up stories; have studied their dreams and asked them directly or in playroom observation what they got out of these stories, what they dislike, how they thought the stories would affect other children—especially younger ones.

Many pre-adolescent boys pass through a phase of disdain for girls. Some comic books tend to fix that attitude and instill the idea that girls are good only for being banged around or used as decoys. A homoerotic attitude is also suggested by the presentation of masculine, bad, witchlike or violent women. In such comics women are depicted in a definitely anti-erotic light, while the young male heroes have pronounced erotic overtones. The muscular male supertype, whose primary sex characteristics are usually well emphasized, is in the setting of certain stories the object of homoerotic sexual curiosity and stimulation. This, incidentally, is increased by the male "art nudes" featured in advertisements in millions of children's

comics, which correspond to the athletic male art nudes appearing in certain magazines for adults so often collected by homosexuals.

In an issue of a popular comic there is on the back cover a full-page colored picture. It shows a stalwart youth, nude except for a well-filled loin cloth. No young man or adolescent in the upper-age groups whom I asked to describe this picture in one word used any expression except "fairy." The boy has long blonde hair falling over his shoulders and bound with a red ribbon over his forehead. On both wrists are green bracelets, and graceful ribands twist around his ankles above his bare feet. He wears a bare dagger coquettishly fixed in front of one hip. He has big blue eyes and a beautiful suntan. His expression, to quote one of the boys who commented on it, is "sissy and sappy."

Many adolescents go through periods of vague fears that they might be homosexual. Such fears may become a source of great mental anguish and these boys usually have no one in whom they feel they can confide. In a number of cases I have found this sequence of events: At an early age these boys become addicted to the homoerotically tinged type of comic book. During and after comic-book reading they indulged in fantasies which became severely repressed. Life experiences, either those drawing their attention to the great taboo on homosexuality or just the opposite—experiences providing any kind of temptation—raise feelings of doubt, guilt, shame and sexual malorientation.

The term *pederasty* does not mean—as is often erroneously believed—a crude physical relationship between men. It comes from the Greek word *pais* meaning a youth or boy, which is also the root of such words as pedagogy. Pederasty means the erotic relationship between a mature man and a young boy.

Several years ago a California psychiatrist pointed out that the Batman stories are psychologically homosexual. Our researches confirm this entirely. Only someone ignorant of the

fundamentals of psychiatry and of the psychopathology of sex can fail to realize a subtle atmosphere of homoeroticism which pervades the adventures of the mature "Batman" and his young friend "Robin." Male and female homoerotic overtones are present also in some science-fiction, jungle and other comic books.

Just as ordinary crime comic books contribute to the fixation of violent and hostile patterns by suggesting definite forms for their expression, so the Batman type of story helps to fixate homoerotic tendencies by suggesting the form of an adolescent-with-adult or Ganymede-Zeus type of love-relationship.

In the Batman type of comic book such a relationship is depicted to children before they can even read. Batman and Robin, the "dynamic duo," also known as the "daring duo," go into action in their special uniforms. They constantly rescue each other from violent attacks by an unending number of enemies. The feeling is conveyed that we men must stick together because there are so many villainous creatures who have to be exterminated. They lurk not only under every bed but also behind every star in the sky. Either Batman or his young boy friend or both are captured, threatened with every imaginable weapon, almost blown to bits, almost crushed to death, almost annihilated. Sometimes Batman ends up in bed injured and young Robin is shown sitting next to him. At home they lead an idyllic life. They are Bruce Wayne and "Dick" Grayson. Bruce Wayne is described as a "socialite" and the official relationship is that Dick is Bruce's ward. They live in sumptuous quarters, with beautiful flowers in large vases, and have a butler, Alfred. Batman is sometimes shown in a dressing gown. As they sit by the fireplace the young boy sometimes worries about his partner: "Something's wrong with Bruce. He hasn't been himself these past few days." It is like a wish dream of two homosexuals living together. Sometimes they are shown on a couch, Bruce reclining and Dick sitting next to him, jacket off, collar open, and his hand on his friend's arm. Like the girls

in other stories, Robin is sometimes held captive by the villains and Batman has to give in or "Robin gets killed."

Robin is a handsome ephobic boy, usually shown in his uniform with bare legs. He is buoyant with energy and devoted to nothing on earth or in interplanetary space as much as to Bruce Wayne. He often stands with his legs spread, the genital region discreetly evident.

In these stories there are practically no decent, attractive, successful women. A typical female character is the Catwoman, who is vicious and uses a whip. The atmosphere is homosexual and anti-feminine. If the girl is good-looking she is undoubtedly the villainess. If she is after Bruce Wayne, she will have no chance against Dick. For instance, Bruce and Dick go out one evening in dinner clothes, dressed exactly alike. The attractive girl makes up to Bruce while in successive pictures young Dick looks on smiling, sure of Bruce. Violence is not lacking in these stories. You are shown Batman and Robin standing in a room with a whole row of corpses on the floor.

In a study of over a thousand homosexual cases at the Quaker Emergency Service Readjustment Center we found that the arousal of homosexual fantasies, the translation of fantasies into fact and the transition from episodic homosexual experiences to a confirmed fixation of the pattern may be due to all sorts of accidental factors. The Batman type of story may stimulate children to homosexual fantasies, of the nature of which they may be unconscious. In adolescents who realize it they may give added stimulation and reinforcement.

In many adolescents the homoerotic, anti-feminist trend unconsciously aroused or fostered by these stories is demonstrable. We have inquired about Batman from overt homosexuals treated at the Readjustment Center, to find out what they thought the influence of these Batman stories was on children and adolescents. A number of them knew these stories very well and spoke of them as their favorite reading. The reply of one intelligent, educated young homosexual was typical: "I

don't think that they would do any harm sexually. But they probably would ruin their morals."

One young homosexual during psychotherapy brought us a copy of *Detective Comics*, with a Batman story. He pointed out a picture of "The Home of Bruce and Dick" a house beautifully landscaped, warmly lighted and showing the devoted pair side by side, looking out a picture window. When he was eight this boy had realized from fantasies about comic-book pictures that he was aroused by men. At the age of ten or eleven, "I found my liking, my sexual desires, in comic books. I think I put myself in the position of Robin. I did want to have relations with Batman. The only suggestion of homosexuality may be that they seem to be so close to each other. I remember the first time I came across the page mentioning the 'secret bat cave.' The thought of Batman and Robin living together and possibly having sex relations came to my mind. You can almost connect yourself with the people. I was put in the position of the rescued rather than the rescuer. I felt I'd like to be loved by someone like Batman or Superman."

A boy of thirteen was treated by me in the Clinic while he was on several years' probation. He and a companion had forced a boy of eight, threatening him with a knife, to undress and carry out sexual practices with them. Like many other hom erotically inclined children, he was a special devotee of Batman: "Sometimes I read them over and over again. They show off a lot. I don't remember Batman's name, but the boy's name is Robin. They live together. It could be that Batman did something with Robin like I did with the younger boy. . . . Batman could have saved this boy's life. Robin looks something like a girl. He has only trunks on."

The Lesbian counterpart of Batman may be found in the stories of Wonder Woman and Black Cat. The homosexual connotation of the Wonder Woman type of story is psychologically unmistakable. The *Psychiatric Quarterly* deplored in an editorial the "appearance of an eminent child therapist as the im-

plied endorser of a series . . . which portrays extremely sadistic hatred of all males in a framework which is plainly Lesbian.”

For boys, Wonder Woman is a frightening image. For girls she is a morbid ideal. Where Batman is anti-feminine, the attractive Wonder Woman and her counterparts are definitely anti-masculine. Wonder Woman has her own female following. They are all continuously being threatened, captured, almost put to death. There is a great deal of mutual rescuing, the same type of rescue fantasies as in Batman. Her followers are the “Holliday girls,” i.e. the holiday girls, the gay party girls, the gay girls. Wonder Woman refers to them as “my girls.” Their attitude about death and murder is a mixture of the callousness of crime comics with the coyness of sweet little girls. When one of the Holliday girls is thought to have drowned through the machinations of male enemies, one of them says: “Honest, I’d give the last piece of candy in the world to bring her back!” In a typical story, Wonder Woman is involved in adventures with another girl, a princess, who talks repeatedly about “those wicked men.”

In the Black Cat stories, the superwoman in ordinary life is a young girl like any other. But when she goes into action, she is “Black Cat” and has donned a sort of Superman uniform. In a story called “Mr. Zero and the Juvenile Delinquent” a little boy is mercilessly beaten and is about to be kicked, as he lies helplessly on the floor, when Black Cat intervenes. On an educational page in the same book she gives good advice for violence as instruction for self-defense:

“Swing the upper part of your body forward while slamming the edge of your left hand against his larynx. The impact will knock him down.” At least!

VIII

“Bumps and Bulges”

Advertising in Comic Books

*“But they have raised no cry,
I wonder why.”*

—Countee Cullen

One is apt to forget that besides delinquent and emotionally disturbed children there are many children who are just plain unhappy. That is particularly true of adolescents. If you gain their confidence and give them a chance to talk to you under suitable circumstances you will find that one of their most frequent and serious worries has to do with the growth of their bodies.

Writing about the health problems of adolescents, Dr. J. Roswell Gallagher, one of the country's leading student-health specialists, gives first place to worries about health and development: "To the adolescent boy they are matters of vital concern. . . . To be abnormal in growth or development is (to him) a very serious matter." He goes on to point out that parents and teachers often misunderstand that "among perfectly normal adolescents" there are great variations in height, weight, size and maturity from the standard average pattern.

Biologically these variations in physical development in boys and girls usually have little significance. They become worries and plague the children in their social context. Unsuitable reading, chance remarks by adults, kidding by other children, over-concern of parents, incautious remarks by doctors and so on are apt to set off worry and unhappiness over being "different" or "abnormal." Sexual maturation, mental and physical, may add associations, guilt feelings and fantasies. It is usually the same areas of the body that are involved in these worries. In boys it is the face (complexion and hair), the body build in general (muscular strength, height and weight) and the primary sexual characteristics. In girls it is the face, the general body build (fat distribution and weight) and the area of greatest psychological sensitivity, the breasts.

In psychotherapy of children with all kinds of difficulties I have found that one of the main goals has to be to raise their self-confidence. Adolescents with these hypochondriacal growth worries can be helped provided they come to the attention of an experienced adult. But for prevention, efforts directed at the

individual child are not enough. Attention must be given to the adults who exploit these anxieties of children commercially.

No better method could be evolved to cause such worries or to aggravate them than the advertising in childrens' comic books. I understand that there are advertising associations or advertising councils interested in keeping products advertised, as well as the manner of their advertising, on an ethical level. If that is true, they must have looked the other way with regard to the stupendous amount of advertising in comic books. In any case, they "raised no cry." Advertising is, or could be—quite apart from its selling aspect—a wholesome educational influence. That in comic books is not only anti-educational, but has done untold harm to children from the point of view of public health and mental hygiene, not to speak of common human decency.

There are different types of adolescents, the Stanley Hall type, the Thomas Wolfe type and others. Whatever their social status, their native ability, they are all more or less susceptible to the worries and anxieties exploited by the scare advertisements in comic books. These advertisements are apt either to cause hypochondriasis or cater to it. In some children such hypochondriacal reactions assume serious forms. In the semi-pornographic, semiobscene magazines for adults sold at the newsstand, some of the same products and some of the same advertisers can be found. Sometimes the names of the firms are different, but the addresses are the same. When these advertisements are in comic books they are slanted to children and adolescents.

Advertisements in comic books have caused decent boys and girls many tears. This advertising brings the comic-book industry an enormous revenue. In the *Journal of the American Medical Association* Dr. Harry F. Dietrich, writing from the point of view of pediatrics, said that "parents must be shown that pimples and pounds are relatively unimportant problems." He spoke of "puerile worrying about temporary cosmetic blemishes,

guilty worrying about juvenile masturbation, and competitive worrying about their children's ounces and inches" as "all this wasted emotional effort." But what chance do parents have when by mass advertising campaigns children are inveigled to worry about these very things and encouraged to keep away from doctors and secretly buy expensive, phony and sometimes harmful remedies?

I have seen a number of cases where pre-adolescents or adolescents have fallen for these advertised products which of course did not help them. The advertisements merely stimulated their hypochondriasis and increased their mental anguish. I have on different occasions openly drawn attention to this public-health violation. It is a matter which the Federal Trade Commission could have taken up. Since the claims in advertisements are often exaggerated, misleading and false, the Post Office could have prosecuted for fraud. Nothing happened, except that the advertisements got more brazen and shameless. Only one health department, one of the biggest and best in the country, took up the matter at all. Its report stated that it found large quantities of "dangerously misleading advertisements" in comic books, and that "many thousand comic books contain ads promoting the sale of bogus patent medicines." It pointed out how these advertisements were especially directed to adolescents: "The comic books grow worse each year in accepting flagrantly misleading ads. The pity of it all is that teen-agers are very conscious of their appearance. They send for these phony-and-harmful skin cure-alls without telling their parents." Nothing was done, however, even after this outspoken confirmation of my findings by an official public health agency. The charmed existence of the comic-book industry evidently extends to its advertisements.

In order to guard youth against overconcern about skin or figure, and to help when they are plagued by fears of abnormality or ugliness, one must try to make them less self-conscious. Dr. Gallagher points out from his experience that one

must assure them that there is no cause for shame. And he warns that one should not even use the word *problems* in this connection because it "has much too gloomy a sound."

Millions of comic books do exactly the opposite. They especially play up these very words which should be avoided. Advertising people tell me that in the profession this is called the "emotional appeal." And that is precisely what it is—ruthlessly playing on the emotions of children. They ask children whether they are not "self-conscious" about one minor or fancied ailment or another, thereby, of course, deliberately *making* them self-conscious or unhappy. They promise to help them if they are "ashamed" about some little, or perhaps even nonexistent, blemish, thereby, of course, causing them to feel unnecessarily ashamed. They frighten the girls by insinuating to them that they have "problem bosoms." This phrase alone thrown at twelve- or thirteen-year-old little girls is enough to precipitate a severe and distressing hypochondriacal reaction. No wonder they are willing to spend money on all kinds of pills, ointments and gadgets!

Even girls without neurotic trends are apt to be sensitive about their breasts during and before adolescence. Some girls mature earlier than their classmates and go through agonies because they fear they are conspicuous. The opposite may of course occur, too. There are all kinds of folklore superstitions that the growth and shape of the breasts has something to do with past or future sexual life. Usually it is difficult for a woman, and much more so for an adolescent girl, to tell even a doctor about such secret preoccupations. A genuine sexual hypochondriasis may center around the breasts in very young girls, with anxiety, fear dreams, preoccupation with sex and guilt feelings.

Here is fertile soil for the comic-book "breast ads." They promise certain help for "problem bosoms," "NO MATTER WHAT SHAPE BOSOM YOU HAVE" (\$5.95). A typical full-page advertisement in a comic book addressed to "Junior" has two photo-

graphs of girls, one average, the other with markedly protruding comic-book-style breasts. The caption says:

DO MEN CHOOSE MARY OR ALICE?

and goes on:

When Tom H— met Mary W— and Alice B—, folks wondered who the lucky girl would be. Both girls were pretty and charming, and grand fun, and enjoyed the same interests Tom did. But, somehow, it was Alice whose lips Tom bent to in the moonlight . . . it was Alice whose "I do" rose breathlessly at the altar. . . .

Tom's choice was not surprising. For it is the woman with a beautiful, alluring bust contour who most often wins the admiration, popularity and affection every woman desires. And there can be no COMPLETE feminine beauty without a warmly rounded, lovely bust contour, symbol of woman eternal. Look through history. Look around you today. It is the woman with graceful, appealing figure lines who enjoys social and romantic triumph. Yes, there are many lovely Marys whose wit, charm and friendliness cannot compete with the natural law of man's attraction to beauty fulfilled *completely*.

The —— Ritual . . . may be able to improve the handicap of unappealing figure lines . . . which may mean the difference between loneliness and thrilling romantic fulfillment! Formerly \$2.00 . . . Don't let skepticism or discouragement deny you the opportunity for happiness . . . Be fair to yourself, to your future as a *woman*.

One must always remember that an issue of such a comic book has an edition of hundreds of thousands of copies. In such a large number, a percentage of unfortunate girls are bound to fall for it, worry themselves sick, keep their worries a secret, and send for the advertised merchandise.

Suppose a girl does not fall for these photographs and the accompanying text. Other advertisements suggest a test even more apt to give her inferiority feelings and make her think

she is not as other girls. "BREASTS LOSING FIRMNESS?" screams another ad (on the same page on which a doll is advertised). This one promises to lift your breast "into a vital-beautiful form." It tries to persuade the adolescent girl that there are three kinds of inferiorities: first, "those with normally firm bosoms who want that added lift and separation that make the difference between an ordinary appearance and *real figure beauty*"; second, those whose breasts lack "firmness"; third, girls with "PROBLEM BOSOMS" (\$1.98).

But maybe even these pictures, their text and the "firmness test" do not make enough girls worried. Then there are full-course lessons in hypochondriasis. In a comic book with stories of love's frustrations there is a full-page advertisement (found in many other comic books, too) with sets of photographs: "Before" and "After." The "Before" look like average girls; the "After" have noticeably protruding breasts. Accompanying these pictures are three sets of diagrams, each purporting to show profiles of women's bust lines. Any girl, of course, especially after she has been alarmed by the text, can identify herself with at least one of these diagrams and brood about the corresponding information: "SELF-CONSCIOUS ABOUT YOUR FLAT-LOOKING BUST LINE?" (\$2.49). Some advertisements are especially directed to growing girls whose busts are just starting to develop and lead off with screamers: "SMALL BUST." They promise a "secret patent-pending feature" for "UNSHAPELY SMALL BUSTS." Such advertisements have caused inferiority feelings in countless children, some of whom will carry this emotional burden with them through life.

The ultrabosomy girls depicted as ideal in comic-book stories and the countless breast and figure advertisements make young girls genuinely worried long before the time of puberty. These very young girls become entrapped by the sex appeal of comic-book pictures and the "emotional appeal" of their advertisements. Laura's case is a good example. One day her mother came home unexpectedly. Laura was nine years old at that time.

As her mother told it to me, "she put tissue paper inside of her dress so that she would have a bosom. She must want to grow up too fast. She wants to grow up and be fixed up beautifully." I asked Laura's mother to tell me more about the girl. "There is nothing wrong with her," she said. "She reads comic books all the time. She reads *Jumbo*, *Archie*, *Jeanie*, *Millie the Model*, also *Nellie the Nurse*. One day my husband picked up a comic book. He said, 'Who the h— reads this?' I said, 'Laura does.' He said, 'What, all those naked women?' I said, 'Well, that is all they sell for the children, what can you do?'" The psychiatric social worker to whom I turned Laura over for guidance reported to me later that the girl had absorbed all the breast lore from comic-book pictures and advertisements.

Some adolescents, depending on their type of constitution, pass through phases of growth when they are apt to be chubby. Is that something unimportant, which most of them will out-grow? No, comic-book ads say. There are "valuable secrets on how to get the most out of your life! DISCOVER HOW TO BE HAPPY . . . LOVED . . . Do something positive about your unsightly superfluous fat" (tablets, \$1.98).

There are other "secrets," too, to help the adolescent girl once she has become sufficiently self-conscious about her figure: belts, girdles, creams, pills, tablets, books, reducing contraptions, massage, etc. In the unending stream of advertisements it goes like this:

I lost 70 lbs. in 5 months

Lose fat fast. 10 lbs. in 10 days (\$2.98)

Reduce safely . . . Take off 7 lbs. the first week! Lose ugly fat now (\$2.50)—(This one is in a comic book endorsed by a psychiatrist.)

How an unhappy fat girl became a happy slim girl . . . 5 lbs., 10 lbs., 20 lbs.—even more, as many as you want! (Full month's supply, \$2.00, three months', \$5.00) Not sold in drugstores

No matter what part of her body a girl may be sensitive about, skillful advertisements take care of every eventuality and scare her with the supposed ugliness and serious import of "BUMPS AND BULGES" (\$2.98). Special attention is drawn to "buttocks":

You have nothing to lose but weight (\$2.00)

It helps restore the right curves in the right places (\$2.00)

Don't suffer humiliation and ridicule by being fat! (\$2.00)

The only known food product listed in medical dictionaries as an aid in reducing! (\$4.00)

Modern medicine has definite scientific knowledge about weight reduction. Expert medical authorities have clearly expostulated this knowledge to other physicians in medical journals. And in popular writings addressed to the non-medical public, it has been made available to adults. But to children we teach exactly the opposite of the well-established scientific truth.

Dr. Frank H. Krusen, chairman of the Council on Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, at the request of the Council on Foods and Nutrition, wrote in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, "No form of external manipulation is capable of removing adipose tissue from a particular region of the body. Massage will not reduce local deposits of fat. . . ." Speaking of "spot reducing," he states that the value of "these devices is absolutely nil." His article makes it perfectly clear that "there is no 'easy way' to reduce fat. Proper reduction of the intake of food is the only logical method of reducing weight."

The excellent pamphlet, "Overweight and Underweight," put out by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, contains genuinely scientific information: "Massage will not take off pounds. . . . There is no way to reduce safely without eating less. . . . No easy way is safe." Unfortunately the number of

adults who read this pamphlet is infinitesimally small in comparison with the millions of children and adolescents who learn the opposite in comics advertisements:

GREATEST BENEFIT IN REDUCING BY MASSAGE

The method is so simple and so easy: NO EXERCISE OR STRICT DIETS. Scientifically designed reducer. Your own private masseur at home.

Apply over most any part of the body—stomach, hips, chest, thighs, buttocks, etc. USED BY EXPERTS. Thousands have lost weight this way. Can be used in the privacy of your own home (\$8.95 plus postage)

Of course adolescents who pass through a slender growth phase are not forgotten:

Skinny Girls are NOT Glamour Girls!

Ashamed of your skinny, scrawny figure?

—— can help you to add pounds and pounds of firm attractive flesh to your figure

Checked by our medical director, a well-known New York practicing physician . . . (\$2.00)

If . . . you are ashamed of your skinny scrawny figure . . . a doctor-approved formula . . . So don't let them snicker at your skinny, scrawny figure. A skinny scarecrow figure is neither fashionable nor glamorous. Remember, the girls with the luscious seductive curves get the dates. (\$2.00)

SKINNY GIRLS DON'T HAVE OOMPH!

You will want those extra pounds that "bring out" your natural eye-catching curves. Take —— faithfully for a week. See if you can't actually feel the difference. (\$2.00 plus C.O.D. charges)

Some perfume advertisements try to make girls anxious and discouraged. "Do people talk about you? Are you alone? Unhappy? Discouraged? Are you a girl who just can't seem to find the right man?" (Gossip perfume, \$2.00 plus postage). Others stimulate girls to erotic fantasies and arouse sadistic-masochistic wishes: "Do you want to make men obey you? . . . Do you want to make him obey your every command? (Chez-Elle perfume, \$2.00 plus postage).

Or:

Dear Friend: . . . the same double power she used when she took a husband away from his wife or a sweetheart away from the arms of his loved one . . . (Diablo's secret perfume, \$3.00 plus postage)

Men killed each other just for her favors and when she beckoned men leaped to obey . . . (Fury perfume, \$3.00 plus postage)

Can you make strong men weak? Do you dream of THRILLING moments of LOVE and ECSTASY? . . . Let Blue Passion help bring him into your arms . . . (Blue Passion perfume, \$2.00 plus postage)

All my life I dreamed that some day I would find a perfume that would raise a man's ardor . . . (Man-Trap perfume, \$2.00 plus postage)

Skin conditions are another field for comic-book scare advertisements. Acne, pimples, blackheads and complexion troubles of all kinds are a cause for worry, inferiority feelings, anxiety and, on account of superstitious beliefs, guilt feelings about sex. This effect they are apt to have not only on insecure children, but on the rank and file of children in general. "Acne affects adolescents at the time of life when their appearance is of most importance to them," writes Dr. Marion Sulzberger. "It often produces feelings of inferiority and psychologic and emotional damage which may be permanent and which often color

later life.” The main trouble with these mild skin conditions is that they upset people, especially children, so seriously. Comic-book advertisements do all that they can to make boys and girls extremely self-conscious about their skin, and to feel miserable when there is the slightest blemish. They promise instant, miraculous cures.

A full page advertisement begins with this dialogue:

“Ask your friend Tom.”

“Tom, why don’t Sis and I get invited to proms and parties?”

“Frankly, Jim, it’s those ugly blackheads.”

Then follows the indoctrination with fears and shame:

What a “black mark” is the blackhead . . . according to men and girls popular enough to be choosy about dates!

“Nobody’s dreamboat!” “Nobody’s date bait!” And that’s not all that’s said of those who are careless about blackheads. But blackheads ARE ugly! Blackheads ARE grimy! And they DON’T look good in close-ups!

So can you blame the fellow who says, “Sure, I meet lots of girls who look cute at first glance. But if, on that second glance, I see dingy black—it’s *good night!*”

Or can you blame the girl who confesses, “I hate to go out with a fellow who has blackheads, if he’s careless about that you’re sure he’ll embarrass you in other ways, too!”

But you—are YOUR ears burning? Well, you’ve company, and, sad to say, good company. There are lots of otherwise attractive fellows and girls who could date anyone they like if they’d only realize how offensive blackheads are and how easily and quickly they could get rid of them, if they *want* to! . . . The “he-man” who’s also clean-cut, will get the breaks wherever he is! . . . Even cute girls get careless. . . . So don’t take chances, cute though you may be!

Another statement in the advertising is, “Those ugly blackheads give others such a wrong impression of you!” Some boys

take this as a reference to masturbation and react with worry, guilt feelings and withdrawal. The advertised cure is to use a gadget to extract blackheads mechanically (\$1.00).

Children read these skin ads very closely. A fourteen-year-old girl said in the Clinic, "I had one pimple once. I read all about it in the pimple ads. I wondered how it would come out if I put something on it." Many boys and girls have more pimples and buy the "remedies" on the strength of such advertisements as these:

Your good qualities—intelligence, character, dignity—all go to nought, are completely cancelled out by a skin that nobody loves to touch . . . To remove the distressing embarrassment of these skin blemishes . . . (\$1.98)

Many of the advertisements give the children the impression that buying such a product is like going to a doctor, thereby keeping them away from real medical advice which might either reassure them quickly or really help them. For example, a big ad directed to girls concerned about pimples says:

STOP Losing Your Chances for Dates . . .

It's so easy that a few weeks from today you won't believe your mirror! . . . PLANNED BY DOCTOR. (\$2.00)

A full-page advertisement with four pictures of schoolboys and girls starts with a blazing headline:

I WAS ASHAMED OF MY FACE

"I just want to be alone!" . . . The skin doctor's formula . . . works wonders . . . (\$2.00 plus postage)

Now while the memory of prying eyes deepens your misery . . . save your present and your future . . . Special Note to Girls . . . Embarrassed by periodic pimples? (\$2.00)

Some children get so worried about acne and the repeated failure of the costly comic-book cures that they withdraw

socially to such an extent that they look like—and have been diagnosed as—incipient schizophrenia. The unwary physician who does not remember that one has to gain a youngster's confidence first and make the diagnosis afterwards may fall into this error. I have seen a number of such cases of skin-sex hypochondriasis. All examinations and tests ruled out schizophrenia. A high school student was presented to me at the Clinic by one of my assistants with a history of liking to be by himself and brooding. He had been previously diagnosed as incipient-schizophrenia. I elicited that what he had were not irrational worries, but very understandable and comic-book-ad inspired ones: "Ever since I was getting out of public school I worried about it [acne]. I read the full-page ads in the comic books and I did what they said, but it didn't help. There are times when I withdraw completely. I can see myself standing there in front of the mirror. I scratched this—I can't remember . . . [weeps]."

A thirteen-year-old girl showed me an advertisement which made her deeply concerned about some minor cosmetic blemish. It has a big photograph of a girl, her head lowered on her arms, her face contorted, evidently from crying, a handkerchief clutched in one hand. Above it in enormous capitals:

STOP crying about PIMPLES

(\$3.00 plus postage charges)

Concern about hair is not overlooked in comic-book ads:

Here is thrilling new hope. Do you want longer hair? . . .
Your hair to become softer, silkier, more lustrous than it has
been before—in just one short week! . . . (\$1.00)

Advertisements for boys cover different areas, but appeal to the same kind of susceptibility to juvenile hypochondriasis as those for girls. The concern of boys with growth and body build is exploited in advertisements illustrated with photographs of supermuscular he-men (often with big genitals like some of the comic-book heroes). I have seen a number of cases

of boys who were developing more slowly than some of their friends, who were only mildly concerned about it until comics ads made them feel downright ashamed. These advertisements go like this:

How to Make YOUR Body Bring You FAME instead of SHAME! Are You Skinny? Weak? Flabby? . . . I know what it means to have the kind of body that people pity! . . . I don't care how old or young you are or how ashamed of your present physical condition . . . I can shoot new strength into your old backbone . . . help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and vitality that you won't feel there's even standing room left for weakness and that lazy feeling! . . .

A full-page advertisement illustrated with photos of muscular he-men says:

From a SKINNY WEAKLING to a MIGHTY MAN . . .

I gained 53 lbs. of MIGHTY MUSCLE. 6½ inches on my CHEST; 3 inches on each ARM. You can do it in 10 minutes a day!

Presently the same advertisement appeared (December, 1953) in a super-endorsed comic book with a public service page of the National Social Welfare Assembly. Now "Skinny" gains "70 lbs." of mighty muscle, his chest grows "7 inches" and his arms "3½ inches each"!

The large art photos of male nudes wearing only scanty trunks are a special comic-book feature. Of course there are boys who look at them admiringly because they are interested in body development. But he must be an inexperienced psychologist indeed who does not know that these photos of supermales serve also other purposes. Boys with latent (and sometimes not so latent) homosexual tendencies collect these pictures, cut them out and use them for sexual stimulation. One of my patients started to cut out these photos at the age of eleven.

One ordinary children's comic has no less than fifteen such photographs!

Many children get hurt in two ways by these he-man ads: They get disappointed when they do not get results, and they get homoerotic fantasies from the photographs. One ten-year-old boy was treated at the Clinic because he had prostituted himself to men. He looked a little too small for his age. He told us how he studied comic-book ads to correct this: "I have one of those books at home. It is no good. I got several. I started doing it for thirty-five days and nothing happened. I tried it for my arm—you know, 'mighty arms.' I thought I could be strong, but it didn't work. All I did was keep the pictures of the wrestlers and boxers and photographs of strong men and muscle men."

Comic-book advertisements give children the idea of scrutinizing themselves in a mirror, to look for anything they should worry about. One ad has a big balloon:

Hey SKINNY! Yer ribs are Showing!

and continues farther down the page:

When you look in the mirror . . . practice in the privacy of your own room . . . just watch your scrawny chest and shoulder muscles begin to swell . . . those spindly arms and legs of yours bulge . . . !

Some of these advertisements hint at worries and guilt feelings based on the superstitiously supposed effects of masturbation.

BUNK! Nobody is just naturally skinny! Girls snickered at me behind my back. Are you always tired? Nervous? Lacking in confidence? Constipated? Suffering from bad breath? Do you want to gain weight?

Another ad advising you how to become "an all-around HE-MAN" says "Prove it to yourself in one night!"

Emphasis on the region of the "crotch" in some ads directs attention to a similar line of thought, as do "supporter" ads (\$2.98) and remedies for "itching" which "may go . . . to the crotch of the legs." (\$1.00). It is not only a fraudulent claim, but an invitation to sexual hypochondriasis when an ad says:

Do the best science knows for you to do to GROW MORE
VIRILE HAIR IN 30 DAYS.

For all these artificially created or aggravated inferiority feelings, the comic-book ads offer one emotional outlet: over-compensation in brutality. Under the thin disguise of self-defense, full-page ads are permitted to tell millions of children:

I BROKE HIS HAND LIKE A MATCH!

It was easy! He was helpless. He howled with pain! . . .
Method of Offensive Defense, based on natural, instinctive
impulse-action . . . Smashing, crashing, bone-shattering,
nerve-paralyzing method . . . 70 BONE-BREAKING SECRETS
. . . (\$1.00—formerly sold at \$5.00)

Besides all these "health," body building, complexion, "bumps-and-bulges," he-man and brutality advertisements there is a stupendous amount of advertising which deserves to be called a childhood armament program. Comic-book advertisements use any device known to advertising writers to fascinate children with weapons. Children have been supplied with arms through these comic-book ads or have learned from them how to make their own weapons, some of them deadly. In one radio discussion about comic books the time-worn argument was raised that Grimm's fairy tales are violent, too. John K. M. McCaffery, newscaster and literary critic, interposed that he had seen lots of weapons advertised in comic books, but had yet to see an edition of Grimm's fairy tales with advertisements of crossbows.

In millions of comic books, ads make all kinds of weapons attractive to children. There are premiums for boys and girls

“consisting of genuine .22 cal. rifles” (of course, with an illustration of the rifle). This is a deadly weapon and only the other day a fourteen-year-old boy killed an eighteen-year-old with one of them.

All kinds of “toy” guns and pistols are advertised in comic books. A typical advertisement has a big picture of a gun:

Amazing new gun. Shoots like a real gun.

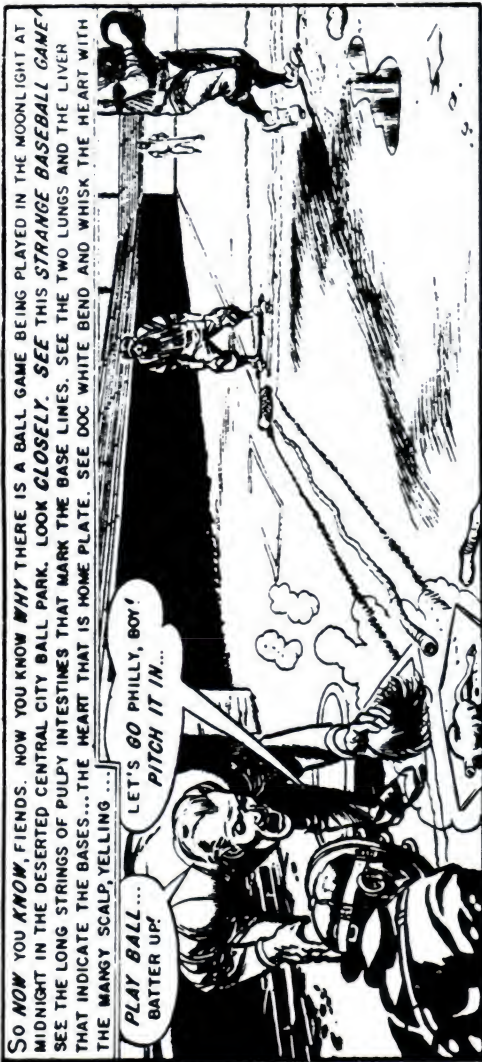
An accompanying sequence teaches how the gun might be used to threaten people:

You fooled us, kid, I thought that gun was a real one!

Other guns can be transformed into dangerous weapons. An eleven-year-old boy who knew his way around told me about one of them: “They can make it snap faster with an elastic. They shoot little round pebbles. You get the pebbles from puzzles they sell in stores. They fall in little holes when the puzzles are jiggled around.”

A great role in the advertising is played by B.B. and air guns. Some shoot B.B.’s, some, steel darts. They are considered harmless by some people—but not by children who have been injured or by those who have lost an eye when shot by them.

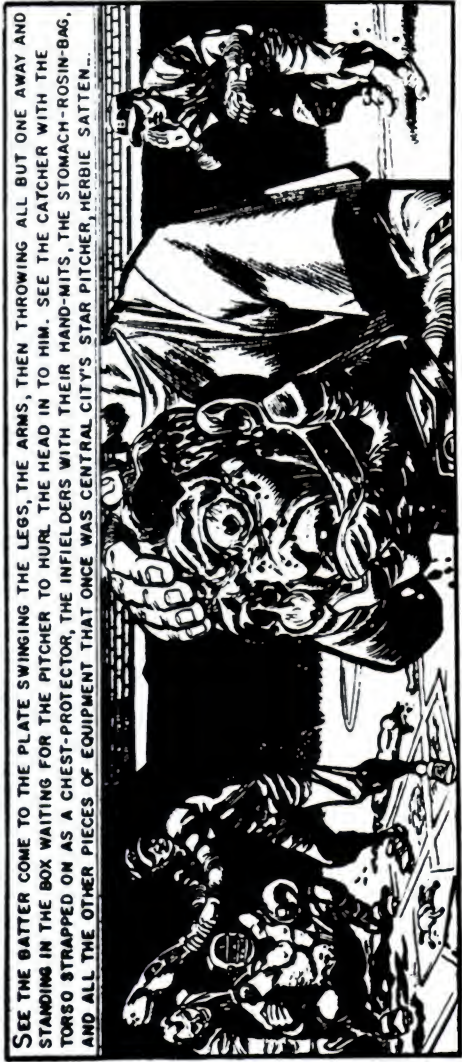
Medical journals and public agencies have drawn attention to the many serious eye accidents from B.B. and air guns. I inquired of one public agency, which knew of a number of cases blinded by these weapons, what they were going to do about it. They answered that they were “planning a campaign to reach all children in school about the horrors of B.B. guns.” Dr. James B. Bain, of Washington, D.C., reports twenty-nine eye injuries, in five of which an eye had to be removed—all caused by B.B. guns in one single year in Washington alone. As reported in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, the Society for the Prevention of Blindness of the District of Columbia reports nine B.B. eye injuries in three months and



SO NOW YOU KNOW, FIENDS. NOW YOU KNOW WHY THERE IS A BALL GAME BEING PLAYED IN THE MOONLIGHT AT MIDNIGHT IN THE DESERTED CENTRAL CITY BALL PARK. LOOK CLOSELY. SEE THIS STRANGE BASEBALL GAME! SEE THE LONG STRINGS OF PULPY INTESTINES THAT MARK THE BASE LINES. SEE THE TWO LUNGS AND THE LIVER THAT INDICATE THE BASES... THE HEART THAT IS HOME PLATE. SEE DOC WHITE BEND AND WHISK THE HEART WITH THE MANGY SCALP, YELLING ...!

LET'S GO PHILLY, BOY!
PITCH IT IN...

PLAY BALL...
BATTER UP!



SEE THE BATTER COME TO THE PLATE SWINGING THE LEGS, THE ARMS, THEN THROWING ALL BUT ONE AWAY AND STANDING IN THE BOX WAITING FOR THE PITCHER TO HURL THE HEAD IN TO HIM. SEE THE CATCHER WITH THE TORSO STRAPPED ON AS A CHEST-PROTECTOR, THE INFELDERS WITH THEIR HAND-MITS, THE STOMACH-ROBIN-BAG, AND ALL THE OTHER PIECES OF EQUIPMENT THAT ONCE WAS CENTRAL CITY'S STAR PITCHER, HERBIE SATTEN ...

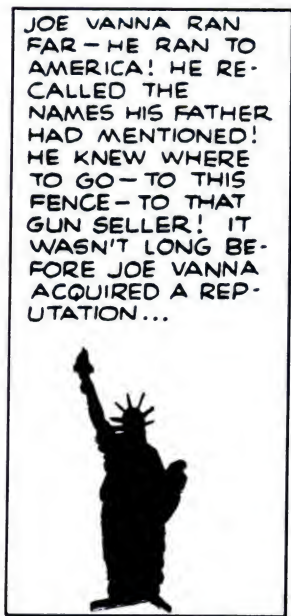
A comic-book baseball game. Notice the chest protector and other details in the text and pictures.



Cover of a children's comic book.



Pity was the keynote when Homer described a dead body dragged behind a war chariot. Dragging living people to death is described without pity in children's comics.



What comic-book America stands for.

A sample of the injury-to-the-eye motif.



An invitation to learning.

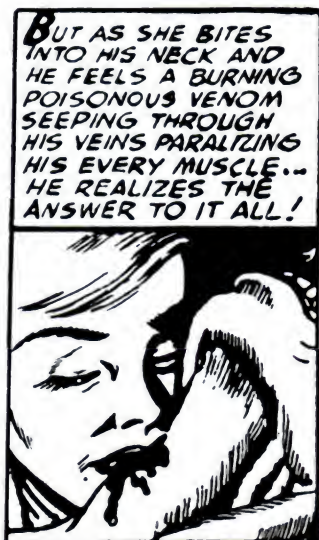




Erotic spanking in a Western comic book.



Indeed!



Sex and blood.



The title of this comic book is First Love.

Children are first shocked and then desensitized by all this brutality.



The wish to hurt or kill couples in *Lovers' Lanes* is a not uncommon perversion.

Stomping on the face is a form of brutality which modern children learn early.

JULY-AUG. 10c

REAL
POLICE
CASES

CRIME DETECTIVE

COMICS

AUTHORIZED
A.C.M.P.



BUT—
I TELL
YA I CAME
HERE BECUZ
I WAS
THINKING
ABOUT MY
MIND!

YEAR, HORSEFACE —
WE KNOW YOU WERE THINKING...
WE SMELLED RUBBER
BURNING -- C'MON — LET'S
SEE WHAT THE JUDGE
THINKS !!

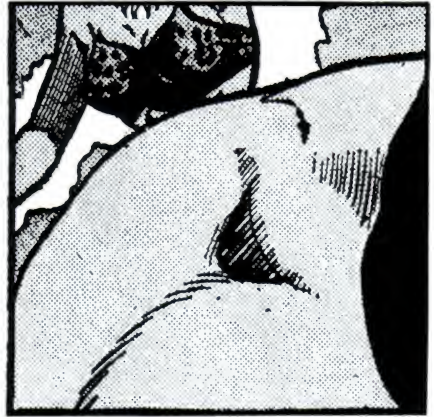


THIS MAGAZINE IS DEDICATED TO THE PREVENTION OF CRIME. WE HOPE THAT WITHIN ITS PAGES THE YOUTH OF AMERICA WILL LEARN TO KNOW CRIME FOR WHAT IT REALLY IS: A SAD, BLACK, DEAD-END ROAD OF FOOLS AND TEARS!

Caricature of the author in a position comic-book publishers wish he were in permanently.



In ordinary comic books, there are pictures within pictures for children who know how to look.



A girl raped and murdered.



Sexual stimulation by combining “headlights” with the sadist’s dream of tying up a woman.



Children call these “headlights” comics.



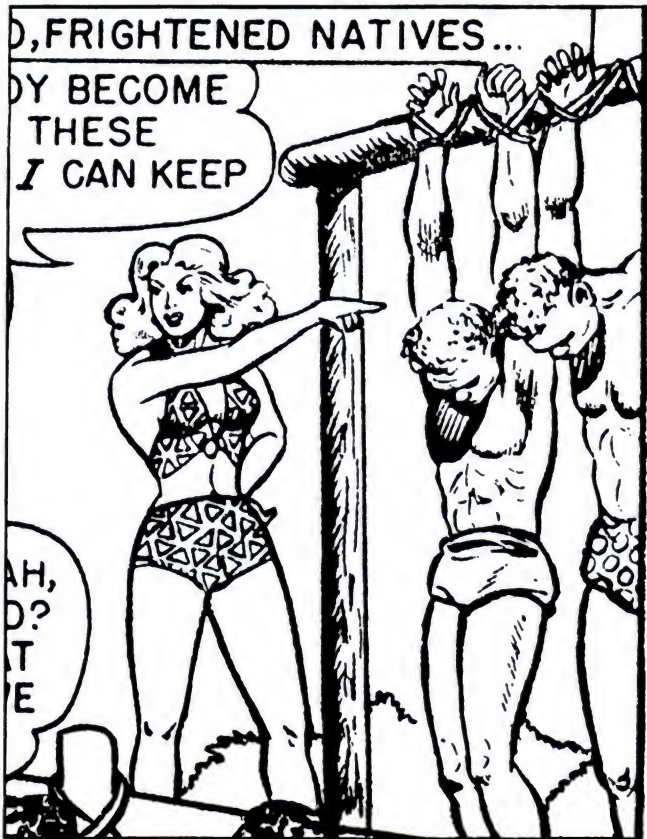
Treating police contemptuously is a comic-book commonplace.



Children told me what the man was going to do with the red-hot poker.



Outside the forbidden pages of de Sade, you find draining a girl's blood only in children's comics.



Corpses of colored people strung up by their wrists.

KID MELTON

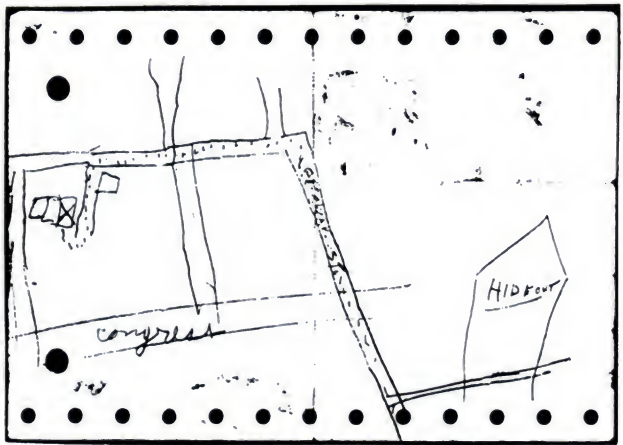
THE KILLER WITHOUT A FRIEND!

BASED ON A TRUE STORY!



I DON'T NEED NOBODY! I'D STICK A SHIV IN MY BEST FRIEND'S BACK IF IT WOULD GET ME AN EASY BUCK! FRIENDSHIP IS FOR SUCKERS! LOYALTY-- THAT'S FOR JERKS!

--SO SPOKE "KID MELTON," CINCINNATI'S MOST HATED CRIMINAL! AND HE BACKED HIS WORDS WITH BULLETS... UNTIL HE LEARNED HIS LESSON THE HARDEST WAY OF ALL!

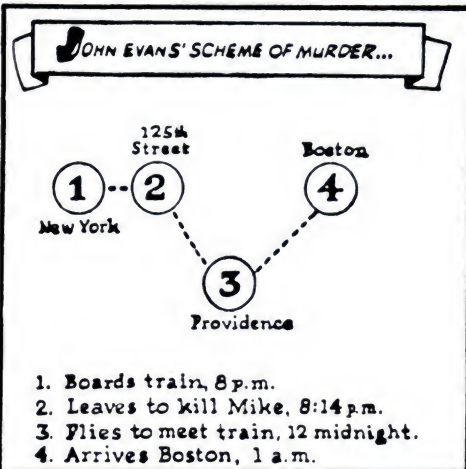


Children's drawing found by police on boy-burglars.



MODERN JUVENILE DELINQUENCY INVOLVES KNOWLEDGE OF TECHNIQUE.

Comic-book map for crime.



How to prepare an alibi.

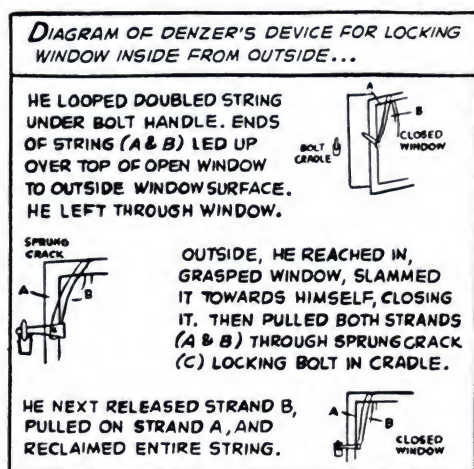
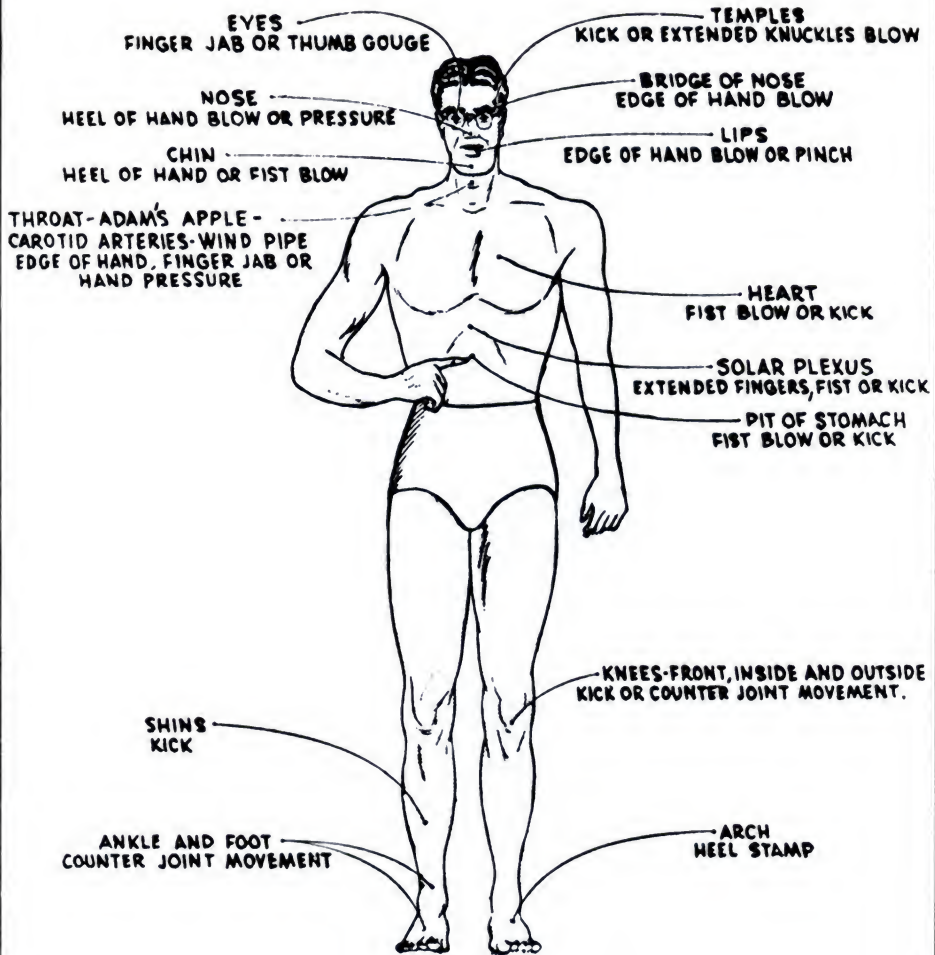


Diagram for housebreakers.

VULNERABLE



FRONT.

ONE OF THE SECRETS OF DEFENSIVE TACTICS IS THIS, THERE ARE CERTAIN SPOTS IN THE BODY MORE SENSITIVE THAN THE REST OF THE BODY AREA. BY CONCENTRATING YOUR ATTACK ON THOSE SPOTS YOU CAN EASILY GAIN THE ADVANTAGE OVER ANY ATTACKER REGARDLESS OF HIS APPARENT SUPERIORITY IN WEIGHT OR SIZE. THESE CHARTS, MADE FOR THE USE OF GOVERNMENT AGENTS IN TRAINING, SHOW JUST WHERE THOSE SPOTS ARE AND WHAT PERSONAL WEAPONS TO USE AGAINST THEM.

HE SCREAMED AS I DROVE IT IN. I FELT IT TEAR FLESH, CRUNCH AGAINST CARTILAGE. I RAISED IT AND STABBED AGAIN AND AGAIN...



I POINTED TO THE SPOT BELOW LON'S CHEST...BELOW THE TORN FLESH AND BLOOD...

LOOK. A NAVEL.
HE HAD A
NAVEL.

INCREDIBLE!
HE... HE WAS
A MAMMAL!



WHERE HE CAME FROM,
THE SUPERIOR RACE
IS THE MAMMAL,
WHICH BEARS ITS
YOUNG ALIVE...
ATTACHED TO THE
MOTHER BY AN
UMBILICAL
CORD.

AND HERE...
WE LAY
EGGS!
WE HAVE
NO
NAVELS!



A young girl on her wedding night stabs her sleeping husband to death with a hatpin when she realizes that he comes from a distant planet and is a "mammal."



THE GRAPHIC STORY OF BOYS AND GIRLS RUNNING
WILD IN THE VIOLENCE-RIDDEN SLUMS OF TODAY!

10¢



REFORM SCHOOL GIRL!

**THEY SUCCUMBED
TO TEMPTATION!**

**This is the story of youth
gone wrong...and of the
penalty hundreds of pretty
girls have to pay when
they allow themselves to
fall victim to unscrupulous
men, their own wayward
emotions, and the other
hidden pitfalls of a
sensation-crazed society!**

Comic books are supposed to be like fairy tales.

asks for laws prohibiting the sale of B.B. guns to children under eighteen: "The only effective way of preventing these injuries is to ban the sale, use and possession of air guns."

According to statistics from 421 hospitals all over the country, reported by *Pathfinder*, there were from Christmas, 1949, through January, 1950, 275 air gun injuries; 164 of them were eye injuries, with permanent impairment of vision in sixty-four and eye removal in twenty-five. Philadelphia pioneered with a humane ordinance banning air guns. The results were spectacular, a lesson to those who do not realize that progress in preventive medicine is helped by laws. Where there had been seventeen air rifle eye injuries treated at Wills Hospital in Philadelphia in the short survey period, in the twenty-five months following enactment of the ordinance there was only one. A similar observation was made in Pittsburgh, where in 1951 an eye injury from B.B. guns occurred once every twelve days; when the use of these guns was restricted there was only one such injury in 1952. No wonder that the National Society for the Prevention of Blindness suggested in 1953 an ordinance, which among other things would prevent the sale of air guns to minors.

All this is a good illustration of the social problems of comic books. On the one hand adults and children are warned against these guns; at the same time glamorous advertisements in comics seduce more and more children into wanting, buying and using them. Children's real interests seem to count for little. While the experts in ophthalmology know the danger of these guns and have advocated the only real method of prevention, there are experts in child psychiatry and education who do not draw the line at endorsing comic books which have ads with big pictures of these guns:

Strap this sweet-shootin' — on your bike . . . Only
\$6.95

Shoot regular steel BBs . . . (\$6.95)

Dr. William C. Menninger has called the pre-adolescent period "the golden age for mental hygiene." It seems also to be the "golden age" for comic-book publishers, advertisers and experts. Text, pictures and medical endorsements blend to lead both child and parent astray. Take a 1953 endorsed comic book which contains the story of "Superman when he was Superboy." It has a full-page colored advertisement for an air rifle in which a newspaper editor says about an air rifle program: "The police like the idea—so does the school superintendent—so do the ministers." The ophthalmologists do not!

After one of the instances when a boy was killed in an adolescent gang fight, John E. Cone, chief of the Kings County District Attorney's homicide bureau, made a full investigation which verified my findings on comic-book advertising. He reported:

"We collected a veritable arsenal of home-made weapons, switch-blade knives, milk can handles converted into brass knuckles, and so forth. We found out pretty much of their ideas were obtained from comic books. For instance, in one book a lad showed us how to change a converted cap gun into a lethal weapon. And these lads also purchased a number of guns as a result of the advertisements contained in these crime comic books. Many times they will say that comic books are for adult consumption, whereas actually the advertisements would never appeal to an adult."

Knives of different kinds are advertised in comic books, too. How far has the armament program for children progressed in the knife category? A search of a single school yielded 141 knives! The attitude of the authorities towards knives in the hands of children seems to be this: Let's permit adults to advertise and sell to juveniles as many knives as possible; then, when they buy and use them let's punish the juveniles as severely as possible. In some neighborhoods detectives and policemen have been instructed to bring to the station house any youth who carries weapons. Weekly checks for dangerous weapons in

places where children are apt to meet have been announced. A national magazine had an article about the dangers of switchblade knives sold to and used by children, with the rather cynical comment that the toll up to now was "relatively small—a few dozen children killed, somewhat more wounded." This article concluded: "Don't let your son be smart-alecky about a knife. De-glamorize knife-carrying to him." What possible good can such suggestions do when at the same time enticing comic-book advertisements offer these very switchblade knives for sale to even the youngest child? And while the ads supply the knives, the stories describe their use for skilled violence. You see the young boy, with his hand in his pocket where the switchblade knife is carried, talking to a grown-up. Suddenly he whips out the knife (and you see the exact way to hold it, with your thumb on the button): "Make a move and I'll whittle you down to half my size!"

Despite the facts that according to police authorities switchblade knives are "one of the worst weapons out," that their sale to children under sixteen is forbidden, that in New York alone teen-agers and switchblade knives were involved in some one thousand stabbings, that switchblade-wielding teen-agers have been held in bail of \$100,000 each, millions of comic books carry illustrated advertisements:

"FLINGS OPEN FAST." "Big size! Only \$1.65."

Juvenile gangs sometimes spring up quickly. Gang leaders have told me about the problem of arming them. Here comic-book advertising has proved a great help. A full-page advertisement offers a:

10-PIECE KNIFE SET

- 8-inch blade roast slicer
- 8-inch blade ham slicer
- 7-inch blade butcher knife
- 5-inch blade sandwich knife
- 4-inch blade vegetable knife

4-inch blade utility knife
3-inch blade paring knife
4-inch blade grapefruit knife
8-inch sharpening knife

The question of the kitchen-set knife ads came up several times in Hookey Club sessions. Once a thirteen-year-old boy said, "This knife set in the comic books is disguised as a kitchen set, but of course the kids immediately know what to use them for. They buy them and split them up. In the schools where I was, the boys use them. They have straps and strap them on their legs. See the point there? They specify the point so that you know how you can use it. But they make out it is for meat! Naturally the boys are not going to buy them for cutting meat and so forth!"

One type of advertisement I call the "arsenal ad." It consists of a whole page of illustrations and text offering guns, pistols, rifles, throwing-knives, leather whips, slingshots, fencing-sets and other useful toys for children of the comic-book era. Police have found whole arsenals of weapons in children's hiding-places and traced some of the arms back to these ads.

Comic books have other dubious advertisements of miscellaneous character. I have examined and treated a number of youths after they had been arrested for prowling about trying to look in windows to see women undressing. Most of them were rather harmless and responded readily to common-sense forms of psychotherapy and guidance. One of them told me about "peeping Tom ads" in comics and other boys confirmed their suggestive significance. There are telescope ads, for example, offering: "*Real power and up-close clear view!* A 1,000 thrills are yours with this powerful imported telescope. Enjoy life! . . . Bring some scenes so close you feel you can touch them!" Another advertisement, for binoculars:

You'll get the thrill of a lifetime when you take your first look through these powerful binoculars. It's positively amaz-

ing how well you can see . . . You'll be able to see people and wild life from a distance and watch what they're doing when they can't see you. Enjoy front row seats from way back!

Boys in New York, Boston or Chicago who buy these binoculars are well aware that there is no "wild life" on city streets. They also know what else these optical instruments can be used for. Some ads point this out:

. . . Bring in distant people with amazing clarity and sharp detail . . . See without being seen . . . (\$3.94)

In some ads it is especially pointed out that you can look into "neighbors' homes" and the illustrated telescope points to a half-nude girl.

Many "human relations ads" are not exactly helpful to juveniles. One is for a course for boys on getting along with girls:

It's Easy to Win Her! Women are funny—Put psychology to work. No more clumsy mistakes for *you* . . . Don't be a Faux pas!

This last phrase would indicate that the retooling for illiteracy has made headway even among advertising copywriters!

There are courses for girls on how to handle boys, too:

Learn once and for all how to get along with men in this amazing handbook

Comic-book stories teach violence, the advertisements provide the weapons. The stories instill a wish to be a superman, the advertisements promise to supply the means for becoming one. Comic-book heroines have super-figures; the comic-book advertisements promise to develop them. The stories display the wounds; the advertisements supply the knives. The stories feature scantily clad girls; the advertisements outfit peeping Toms.

IX

The Experts for the Defense

The Scientific Promotion of Comic Books

*“But when you notice the intent,
You are dismayed at what is meant.”*

—Schiller

The direct effect of comic books on children through their pictures, text and advertisements is reinforced by an indirect influence: endorsements and writings of experts. They affect the child through parents, teachers, doctors, clergymen, adults in general and public opinion.

The comics industry took hold of the minds of children unobserved. Those whose function it would have been to watch what happens to children took no notice of comic books, or if they did, regarded them as trivial; at any rate, did not read them. When through sporadic cases it came out that comic books had harmed children, the conquest of American childhood by the industry was already an accomplished fact. The children, many of them despite guilt feelings, accepted the comic books, and the adults, many of them against their better judgment, accepted the opinions of the experts.

The experts for the defense function primarily on two fronts: first, to counteract the healthy reaction of parents against crime comics in all their disguises; secondly, to combat the criticism voiced by professional people once they begin to look at samplings of comic books children have been reading for years. The activity of these experts for the defense came in two waves. One, in the early forties, followed the disclosure of what comic books really are by the literary critic, Sterling North. The second, in 1948, came after I first presented the results of my studies of comic books in Washington and demonstrated their actual sadistic marrow. These two peaks are well documented by the two special comic-book issues of the *Journal of Educational Sociology*, both edited by Professor Harvey Zorbaugh of New York University's School of Education. Their special pleading in the guise of "dispassionate scrutiny" represented an all-time low in American science. But as publicity for comic books these issues were well-timed and immensely successful.

From magazines, newspapers and the radio, and from the endorsements on so many comic books, one may get the wrong impression that there are many scientific experts defending

comic books. Actually the brunt of the defense is borne by a mere handful of experts. Their names occur over and over again. They are connected with well-known institutions, such as universities, hospitals, child-study associations or clinics. That carries enormous weight with professional people and, of course, even more so with casual lay readers and parents all over the country.

In their actual effect the experts for the defense represent a team. This, of course, does not mean that they work as a team. They work individually. But their way of reasoning, their apologetic attitude for the industry and its products, their conclusions—and even their way of stating them—are much alike. So it is possible to do full justice to them by discussing them as a team rather than individually. There is little danger of quoting them out of context, for what they have to say is so cut and dried that one quotation from the writing of one expert fits just as well into that of another.

Of course they contradict one another occasionally, or contradict themselves between one paper and another. That is not really their fault, but part of the impossible thesis they defend. One expert who has endorsed an enormous number of crime comics, for example, will point out the great vital appeal they have for children, while another proclaims that “crime comics are read mostly by adults.” One writes: “Comic-book readers like their comics in large doses,” while another is proclaiming that “an excess of this reading suggests a need for deeper study, not of the reading, but of the child.” Or one will say that comic-book stories are only fantasy and the children know it, while another is saying of comic-book characters, “To their readers they are real flesh and blood people.” Or, to take an example of self-contradiction from a rather sketchy article by another of the experts: He writes that only 36 per cent of adults unqualifiedly approve of comic books as reading for children and that the objections refer to the most serious areas a parent can be concerned about, the “danger to character and mental health.”

Despite this, he draws the contradictory conclusion that "on the whole American adults approve the comics as a medium of entertainment for children."

One expert writes about the fact that children, while they may neglect their other possessions, "hardly ever deface or lose a comic book. These books are treasured, they are objects of barter, they become collector's items." Another expert writes that the fact that comic books are "cheap publications which may be destroyed or bartered without compunction makes the comics comparable to stories told by storytellers of old." In other words, facts do not make much difference to these experts; comic books are good anyhow.

The question of why children become excessive crime-comics readers is also answered both ways by the experts. On the one hand they say that this excessive reading is, in each individual child, the sign of a separate disease. On the other hand, they state with equal confidence that it is part of the normal stages of childhood. Actually, of course, the stages of childhood do not unfold automatically, independent of social influences. Excessive comic-book reading is an adult-induced condition, to which, for a number of reasons, some children are more susceptible than others, although none is immune.

Comic books, one expert writes, "may be used as an introduction to reading of the originals—particularly of the Bible." Another team-expert will inadvertently admit the opposite, that "one of the most unfortunate things about comic books is that . . . children are not so apt to read better books which might of course influence them to higher ideals."

The names of experts for the defense and of the institutions with which they are connected have been printed in millions of comic books and/or full-page comic-book advertisements in the *Saturday Evening Post* and the *Saturday Review of Literature* and/or in statements by the publishers or their spokesmen. The chairman of the Section of Criminal Law of the American Bar Association, commenting on the writers in the two special

comic-book issues of the *Journal of Educational Sociology*, found it "disappointing" that in a "purportedly objective study" experts do "not make a complete disclosure of their interests." He further mentions that when he wrote to one of the experts to enquire about this, "she did not respond." *

In quoting experts for the defense in this chapter I am referring to those specifically mentioned in the Kefauver Report as having or having had connections with the industry. There are, of course, sporadic experts who have defended comic books without any such connection. I do not consider them as members of the defense-team.

Speaking in a very different connection of "impartial" studies made by experts economically connected with an industry, the Commissioner of Investigation of the City of New York has taken the view that such studies should be discounted: "You do not bite the hand that feeds you." The New York State Joint Legislative Committee to Study the Publication of Comics, in seeking the opinions on crime comics from a wide variety of experts, including psychiatrists, judges and educators, discounted testimony by any of these team-experts. This may well be a proper attitude to take in order to ascertain the true facts for judicial or legislative purposes. But since I was carrying out a scientific investigation I took a different course, and studied all

* According to the Kefauver Senate Crime Committee (Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce) the following persons, among others, who are thought of as independent critics by the public, have been or are employed by the comic-book industry: Dr. Jean A. Thompson, Acting Director, Bureau of Child Guidance, Board of Education, N.Y.C.; Sidonie Gruenberg, director of the Child Study Association of America; Prof. Harvey Zorbaugh, Professor of Education, New York University; Dr. Laretta Bender, child psychiatrist in charge of the children's ward of Bellevue Hospital, N.Y.C.; Josette Frank, consultant on children's reading, Child Study Association of America. The amounts paid range to \$300 a month over a period of many years. One expert, Professor Zorbaugh, served as "research consultant to *Puck, the Comic Weekly*." One comic-book publisher alone spends \$750 a month on four children's experts who endorse his products.

the team-experts carefully as if their opinions had been expressed gratis. I cannot agree with some of the experts that the fact that comic books are so widely read proves them to be all right. To my mind it only shows that they are deserving of study. In the same way, I do not believe that because the opinions of the experts for the defense are so well circulated, they must be all right. To me that indicates that they, also, are a proper object of study.

As my inquiry proceeded, I wanted continuously to criticize my own conclusions in the light of the opposing views. So I took all the experts very seriously, at least until I had analyzed their arguments. The devil can quote scripture for his purpose. What would these experts quote? I found them mentioning Aristotle, Freud and the brothers Grimm. According to *Newsweek's* "Platform," "at least half of all comic books" in 1949 "were devoted entirely to crime or supermen, in their assorted guises." (In actual copies read, the number is much larger, and by 1954 the proportion was very much higher.) Can there be any scientific theories to justify that? Paid partisanship is not the complete answer. The influence of the experts for the defense is to be explained not only by the fact that the public is being misinformed about comic books, but that it is exposed to wrong ideas about children. On that soil both comic books and their experts flourish. So the little comic book, with its pictures, text and advertisements and expert endorsers is an indicator of a generalized reaction of society.

The writings and speeches of the experts for the defense have many features in common. They always shy away from telling what is actually in comic books, what the plots are, what the characters really say and do. They do not want to call attention to the books, they prefer to put all the blame on the child, or his mother. As one of them writes in one of those "neutral" articles in a national magazine: "We must look not at the comics but at the child." Why should I as a doctor look only at the child and "not at the comics"? Why not look at both? This same

expert notes, not without sarcasm, that comic books “grew to considerable dimensions before the ‘guardians of our culture’ were aroused by them.” But should not the guardians of our children have been aroused first?

Here is an example to show how impossible it is to get any idea of what comic books really are from these writings by defense experts. In an article on comic books widely circulated by the Child Study Association of America, purporting to be a “survey” of the whole comic-book field, only the following titles of comic books are even mentioned:

- 1) *Superman* (whose publisher employs the writer of the pamphlet)
- 2) *Mickey Mouse*
- 3) *Donald Duck*
- 4) *Mutt and Jeff*
- 5) *Moby Dick*
- 6) *Three Musketeers*
- 7) *True Comics*
- 8) *Blondie*
- 9) *Lil Abner*
- 10) *Jungle Comics* (described with the classical understatement that “sometimes women are featured in these stories, as captives or intended victims”)

This is supposed to be a *survey*! One need only glance at any newsstand to discover that the most important part has been left out. This misrepresentation goes so far that the same expert writes, “There is a considerable amount of humor in the comics” (she means comic books) and she tries to make parents believe that the sexy wenches in the jungle books are just “fair maidens”!

The experts for the defense do not tell you what children get out of these stories, either, what they actually say, what is reflected from comic books in their minds. Instead they write about the good things that comic books are supposed to have

done, be doing or will do in the future, about how educational they are or could be, and to what good uses they could be put. One states, for example, "History is often a dull subject. . . . Through comics it could be made a fascinating study. . . . American history would become a popular study in school. . . ." Unquestionably it is fascinating to learn that George Washington needed the help of Superboy to cross the Delaware. But do you want to direct the child's attention to the personality of the father of American democracy or to the exploits of a uniformed superman-youth? Similarly, it must be admitted that a lesson about anthropoid apes is less "dull" when accompanied by a picture of the animal about to rape a girl.

Pooh-poohing their bad effects, one expert points out that he knows a hospital where "comic books are used specifically to calm down troublesome" juveniles. He does not mention that this is the only psychiatric hospital in the country where troublesome juveniles sent there for observation and treatment got so out of hand that the police had to be called to "calm them down."

The team-experts like the word *deep*. It occurs over and over again in their writings, e.g. "the appeal of comic books is *deeply* rooted in our emotional nature." They use this word as an answer to any objection that is raised. The reply that things are "deep" or "deeper" or "far deeper" is supposed to answer everything. In one short paper the word occurs four times: "The motivation toward unsocial acts lies much deeper than any casual contact with ideas on a printed page"; the language habits of children "derive from deeply rooted home and school standards and not from any casual contact with any entertainment medium"; these "comic book characters are deeply human"; only if a child is "in deep emotional conflict he may be further burdened or disturbed by his comics reading."

One hopes to find in these writings at least one case where a comic-book addict seemed to be adversely influenced by comics

in which it was proved that not comic books but something "deep" was the real cause. But in all the writings of the experts I found not a single case like this. Instead there are again and again flat statements like this: ". . . the roots of delinquency and crime are far deeper," or ". . . the roots of [the] difficulties lie in . . . his life . . . rather than in the storybooks that he reads." Who then has gone to the root of the problem? One expert tells us: "Superman strikes at the root of juvenile delinquency" and apparently this is "deep" enough.

Those who have studied comic books seriously know that comic books have to be differentiated from newspaper comic strips. Dr. Richmond Barbour, director of guidance of the city schools of San Diego, writes: "The easiest way to study abnormal psychology these days is to read the unfunny crime comic books. Don't mistake them for the comic strips your paper prints. Papers wouldn't dream of printing the stuff. . . ." Yet the experts in their writings speak unspecifically of "comics" and seem to be trying to mix comic books with newspaper comic strips, much to public confusion.

Without exception all these experts have in common one trait that is not in agreement with the best established usage of scientific writing. If a scientist wishes to prove that a special virus is not the cause of a virus disease, it is obligatory that he at least refer to the literature which says the opposite. But these comic-book experts continuously quote each other and try to bury in complete silence some of the studies that have been made demonstrating the harmfulness of comic books. So it is necessary to get acquainted with samples of this literature which are never mentioned.

Dr. George E. Reed, director of a large psychiatric hospital affiliated with McGill University, in a paper read before the American Psychiatric Association, reported on a study of the effect of comic books on normal children from seven to fourteen. He proceeded in a strictly scientific manner, using among other procedures a "game technique." He determined the latent

as well as manifest meaning of the pictures to the child. It is noteworthy that his observations were made before crime comics came to full bloom in the blood-and-bra formula. In contrast to the experts for the defense, Dr. Reed said what the comic books are about: "Violence is the continuous theme, not only violence to others but in the impossible accomplishments of the heroes, heroines and animals." He found undue stress on superdevelopment of hero and heroine: ". . . any variation from this 'norm' is the subject of suspicion, ridicule or pity." He noted that "distorted educational data are common"; that "direct action" by the hero is "superior to the dumb and incompetent police"; that race hatred is taught: ". . . foreigners are all criminals"; that "scantly clad females [are] man-handled or held in a position of opisthotonos [exaggerated intercourse-like position]." It was his opinion that juvenile delinquency is in part dependent on environment and that "comic books are of increasing importance as a part of children's environment." With regard to sexual development he drew this important conclusion: "The repeated visualization of women being treated violently by men can do nothing but instill an ambivalent emotional attitude in the child toward heterosexual contacts." In other words, he pointed to a profound disturbance of normal psychosexual development of children through the medium of comic books. As a result of his studies he regarded it as "fallacious" to consider comic books as a substitute for mythology or folklore, or to regard them as a normal emotional outlet for normal children. In vain will you look for any mention of this carefully weighed psychiatric report in any of the writings of the team-experts professing to express both sides and enlighten the public.

Sister Mary Clare, a trained and experienced teacher, published a study of the effect of comic books on children under eleven. She found that the innocuous comic books of the humorous and animal type that parents know about form "an insignificant minority." She found that comic books have "their

greatest appeal during the years when the children's ideals are being formed, that is, from 3 or 4 to 12." She sums up the relation of comic books to delinquency: "Children want to put into action what they have learned in their 'comics,' thinking they can have the thrill that is theirs only vicariously as they read. Sometimes they set out to imitate the hero or heroine, sometimes it is the criminal type that appeals, and of course they are sure that they will not fail as the criminals did in the magazine story, for 'getting caught' is the only disgrace they recognize." She deplores particularly the harm comic books do to children's eyes. Another effect of comics on young children is excessive daydreaming along unhealthy lines. One of her observations is that "scenes of crime, fighting and other acts of violence are among the items most noted and best remembered by even the youngest children." She relates this to her finding that in adventure comic books there is a "disproportionate emphasis on crime, sadism and violence."

One of her cases highlights what comic books do to the minds of many children. She asked a nine-year-old boy which comic book he liked best and he answered without hesitation: "*Human Torture*."

"You mean '*Human Torch*,' don't you?"

"No," he said positively, "*Human Torture*."

Dr. B. Liber, experienced psychiatrist and author of a textbook of psychiatry, states that "abnormal thinking and behavior may be due to other causes as well, but the comic books contribute their share." He cites the case of a nine-year-old boy: "His gestures with arms and legs and his motions with his entire body illustrated the crimes which he feared and enjoyed at the same time—'strangling is like this and like this. . . .'" This boy described his fears and thrills: "Then there is the natives. They tear a guy apart. In two halves . . . I like the Superman. . . . I like stabbing a tiger . . . I like Nero fiddling Rome with some fire." Dr. Liber sums up his opinion like this: "The problem of the comic books has not been solved and will not be as

long as somebody can make much money through their existence and popularity. Their source is fiendishness, viciousness, greed and stupidity. And their effect is foolishness, mental disturbance and cruelty.”

A sociologist, Harold D. Eastman, carried out an analysis of some five hundred comic books and with the aid of his sociology students studied several hundred high school pupils from three high schools, thirty-five children at the fourth-grade level, pupils from a rural school and inmates of two institutions for the treatment of juvenile delinquents. In experiments with the fourth-grade children he found that over half of them wanted to play the part of the villain. As far as the relationship of comic-book reading to delinquency is concerned, he found that crime comics and generally not acceptable comics were “the most desired reading for the juvenile delinquents.” Crime comic books were listed as first choice by more than 90 per cent of the inmates of both institutions for delinquents. With regard to the question of imitation he cited the case of a fourteen-year-old high school girl who stated that “she didn’t like comic books because her boy friend read them all the time and tried to make love to her as he imagined Superman would do it and she didn’t like that at all.”

He analyzed ten comic-book heroes of the Superman type according to criteria worked out by the psychologist Gordon W. Allport and found that all of them “may well be designated as psychopathic deviates.”

In another study, by Mary Louisa McKinney, who has studied comic books and lectured to PTA groups in Tennessee, the reactions to comic books of seventy-five children aged ten, eleven and twelve were studied. There were some who spent up to fifty hours a week on them. Her outstanding finding was that although children realized that comic books made their “pleasant dreams turn bad,” they kept on reading them.

What do the experts for the defense have to say? We can disregard their remarks that there are comic books which are

read only by adults. One expert herself admits that “wherever there are comic books you will most certainly find children.”

The experts say children do not imitate what they see in comic books. As Governor Smith used to say, let us look at the record:

- 1) A boy of six wrapped himself in an old sheet and jumped from a rafter. He said he saw that in a comic book.
- 2) A twelve-year-old boy was found hanged by a clothesline tossed over a rafter. His mother told the jury that she thought he re-enacted a scene from comic books which he read incessantly. The jury returned a verdict of accidental death and scored comic books.
- 3) A boy was found dead in the bathroom, wearing a Superman costume. He had accidentally strangled himself while trying to walk on the walls of the room like his hero.
- 4) A boy of ten accidentally hanged himself while playing “hanging.”
- 5) A fourteen-year-old boy was found hanging from a clothesline fastened over a hot-water heating pipe on the ceiling. Beside him was a comic book open to a page showing the hanging of a man. The chief of police said, “I think the comic-book problem can’t be solved by just a local police ban. It will require something bigger.”
- 6) A ten-year-old boy was found hanging from a door hook, suspended by his bathrobe cord. On the floor under his open hand lay a comic book with this cover: a girl on a horse with a noose around her neck, the rope tied to a tree. A man was leading the horse away, tightening the noose as he did so. The grief-stricken father said, “The boy was happy when I saw him last. So help me God, I’ll be d—— if I ever allow another comic book in the house for the kids to read!”

- 7) A boy of eleven was found hanged from a rope in the bathroom. He had the habit of acting out stories he had read in comic books.
- 8) A boy of thirteen was found hanged in the garage. On the floor was a comic book showing a hanging.
- 9) A boy of twelve was found hanging from a clothesline in a woodshed. On the floor was a stack of comic books.
- 10) A ten-year-old boy was found unconscious, hanging from a second story balcony. He got the idea from a comic book he had been reading.
- 11) A boy died after swinging in a noose from a tree. He had tried to show another boy "how people hang themselves." The City Council denounced the "mind-warping" influence of comic books.
- 12) An eight-year-old boy jumped from a second-floor fire escape "like Superman" and broke both his wrists.

One conclusion of the experts that has been widely accepted is that, as one of them puts it, comic books "are really the folklore of today," or that what is in them "is the folklore of the times, spontaneously given to and received by children. . . ." This seems to be a disarming argument. But is it true?

What is folklore? The term was introduced over a hundred years ago by the British scientist W. G. Thoms. It is now used in many other languages. Authorities seem to agree on the definition of folklore as "the oral poetic creations of broad masses of people." Folklore has intimate connections with other arts, from dances to folk plays and songs. In the history of mankind folklore has played an important role. It is one of the fountains of wisdom and of literature. Many writers—among them the greatest, such as Shakespeare and Goethe—have drawn on it. It does not require much thought to realize that comic books are *just the opposite*. They are not poetic, not literary, have no relationship to any art, have as little to do with the American people as alcohol, heroin or marihuana, although many people

take them, too. They are not authentic creations of the people, but are planned and concocted. They do not express the genuine conflicts and aspirations of the people, but are made according to a cheap formula. Can you imagine a future great writer looking for a figure like Prometheus, Helena or Dr. Faustus among the stock comic-book figures like Superman, Wonder Woman or Jo-Jo, the Congo King?

When children act out comics stories, the results are destructive. But children's real nature comes to the fore when they are given the chance to act out stories from genuine folklore and children's folk tales. Frances C. Bowen has shown this in her wonderful Children's Educational Theater at Johns Hopkins University. "Overly exuberant children," she found, "learn to be co-operative and find a wholesome outlet for their energies."

Another statement by a comic-book expert that has gained wide currency is that comic books contain "a strikingly advanced concept of femininity and masculinity." In further explanation of this statement it is said: "Women in the stories are placed on an equal footing with men and indulge in the same type of activities. They are generally aggressive and have positions which carry responsibility. Male heroes predominate but to a large extent even these are essentially unsexed creatures. The men and women have secondary sexual mannerisms, but in their relationship to each other they are de-sexed."

If a normal person looks at comic books in the light of this statement he soon realizes that the "advanced concept of femininity and masculinity" is really a regressive formula of perversity. Let's compare this statement with the facts. One of the many comics endorsed by this child psychiatrist has the typical Batman story, the muscular superman who lives blissfully with an adolescent. Is it so advanced to suggest, stimulate or reinforce such fantasies? The normal concept for a boy is to wish to become a man, not a superman, and to live with a girl rather than with a superheroic he-man. One team-expert has himself admitted that among the three comic-book characters "most

widely disapproved” by adults are Superman and Batman—the prototypes of this “advanced concept of masculinity.” Evidently the healthy normal adult rejects them.

As to the “advanced femininity,” what are the activities in comic books which women “indulge in on an equal footing with men”? They do not work. They are not homemakers. They do not bring up a family. Mother-love is entirely absent. Even when Wonder Woman adopts a girl there are Lesbian overtones. They are either superwomen flying through the air, scantily dressed or uniformed, outsmarting hostile natives, animals or wicked men, functioning like Wonder Woman in a fascistic-futurist setting, or they are molls or prizes to be pushed around and sadistically abused. In no other literature for children has the image of womanhood been so degraded. Where in any other childhood literature except children’s comics do you find a woman called (and treated as) a “fat slut”? The activities which women share with men are mostly related to force and violence. I admit they often use language—“advanced,” I suppose—which is not usually associated with women. Dr. Richmond Barbour mentions an example: “Try this in ya belly, ya louse’ the young lady says as she shoots the uniformed policeman in his midsection. Scantily dressed, thighs and breasts exposed, she is leading three similar gun-girls. One has been shot, and she is falling. Another girl shoots at the police with a revolver and mutters, ‘Here’s one fer luck!’”

The prototype of the super-she with “advanced femininity” is Wonder Woman, also endorsed by this same expert. Wonder Woman is not the natural daughter of a natural mother, nor was she born like Athena from the head of Zeus. She was concocted on a sales formula. Her originator, a psychologist retained by the industry, has described it: “Who wants to be a girl? And that’s the point. Not even girls want to be girls. . . . The obvious remedy is to create a feminine character with all the strength of Superman. . . . Give (men) an alluring woman stronger than themselves to submit to and they’ll be proud to

become her willing slaves." Neither folklore nor normal sexuality, nor books for children, come about this way. If it were possible to translate a cardboard figure like Wonder Woman into life, every normal-minded young man would know there is something wrong with her.

The experts claim that the theme of comic books is good conquering evil, law triumphing over crime. There are many more crimes in comic-book stories than crimes that are punished. Moreover, punishment in comic books is not punishment; it usually takes the form of a violent end. Melodrama instead of morality. Comic books direct children's interest not toward the right, but toward the wrong. In many stories the criminal wins to the very end, and you see the man who has murdered his wife triumphantly pouring the rest of the poison into the sink in the last picture. There are whole comic books in which *every* story ends with evil triumphant.

If the forces of law do win in comic books, they do so not because they represent law or morality, but because at a special moment they are as strong and brutal as the evildoer. The real message of the comic books to children is the equation: physical force equals good. As, the author and critic, Marya Mannes wrote: "In twenty million comic books sold it would be hard to find a single instance where a character conquered only because he was kind, honest, generous or intelligent." Can there be a more serious indictment?

"Comic books," said Frances Clark Sayres of the children's department of the New York Public Library, "reduce everything to the lowest common denominator of violence, vulgarity and commonplace expression." That seems true also in the sphere of moral judgments. A comic-book publisher's advertisement embellished with names of some of the experts says: "It is on record that Cain killed his brother. And Peter Rabbit *stole a carrot*, if we remember rightly!" Murder as no more significant than taking a carrot! That is the ethics of the comic books, ethics with which the experts evidently have no quarrel.

The experts further claim that comic books are an aid for children in their general adaptation to life and, as one of them puts it, can serve as "mechanisms for personal experimentation with reality." It is not clear how children are supposed to do this. Are they supposed to play the hunters or the hunted? The torturers or the tortured? The rapers or the raped? Are they to fantasy that they stab wild animals or girls in the eye or that wild animals will come to their aid when they need help? Where does the reality of life come in? Adaptation to the reality of life consists in learning to use one's faculties for something constructive, to make an effort to apply oneself, to seek guidance from those who know better, to respect the rights and wishes of others, to learn self-discipline. The reality of life may consist in a struggle, but that does not mean a continual violent physical fight between those who are not allowed to kill and those who are permitted to kill.

In vain does one look in comic books for seeds of constructive work or of ordinary home life. I have never seen in any of the crime, superman, adventure, space, horror, etc., comic books a normal family sitting down at a meal. I have seen an elaborate, charming breakfast scene, but it was between Batman and his boy, complete with checkered tablecloth, milk, cereal, fruit juice, dressing-gown and newspaper. And I have seen a parallel scene with the same implications when Wonder Woman had breakfast with an admiring young girl, with checkered tablecloth, cereal, milk, toast and the kitchen sink filled with dishes draining in the background.

Mastery of reality is based on a normal and not an abnormal set of human values. What the comic books give children to "experiment with" is either the reality of the sordid or what Stephen Spender calls "glamorized unreality." What the experts are telling us is that children have to learn to accept violence as a part of life, not only violence in the name of a cause, but violence for violence's sake. Adaptation requires sustained effort. The only effort that comic books teach is to avoid errors

if you don't want to be caught. That pervades even their slippery slogans: "Forget one detail and there is no perfect crime!"

There are children who suffer from frustration. One team-expert's advice is: "Superman symbolizes the modern attempt in dealing with these problems (of frustration). . . . If not Superman himself, some one of the many other characters such as the Batman, The Flash, Captain Marvel, and the Green Lantern." Is that the best we can do for children, that we teach them the Green Lantern will help?

Another apologia brought forth by the experts is that "anything in which children show such absorbing interest must meet some emotional need in the child." But, if a child shows any trouble, he presents "special problems which call for careful consideration not in relation to his reading alone but to more fundamental emotional needs." In other words, comic books supply the needs of children only if nothing goes wrong. If anything goes wrong, we are told that they do not supply the needs of children and that we must leave out comic books entirely and search for ever deeper needs beneath needs. This talk of deeper and deeper needs is science fiction rather than science.

This passage by one expert is often quoted by the others: "Much of what children find in the comics deals with their own unconscious fantasies. It is possible . . . that they need this material as a pattern for their dreams to give them content with which to dream out their problems." This is the most derogatory statement about normal children that I have ever read. It confuses what a child needs with what he can be seduced to desire. Some comic books depict necrophilia. Does that supply a need in the child? Many comic books describe every conceivable method of disposing of corpses. Do children need that for their daydreaming? It is a fallacy to regard the aberrations of adults as the needs of children.

Children need action and comic books supply that, the experts say. But no instrumentality has ever been invented to

keep children more inactive than comic books. Moreover action is not merely action. It has content, meaning and emotional interest. The kind of action depicted in comic books is not what children need, but what adults think will excite them and sell.

Do we really know so little about children's needs as these experts imply? Children need friendliness, they need a feeling of identification with a group, they need cheer and beauty. And they want and need honest and disinterested guidance, because it gives them a feeling of security. It is precisely here that the comic-book industry and its experts stab them in the back.

Closely related to the argument that comic books supply children's needs is the further one that the child has his own choice about comic books. He can select what he wants and the responsibility is therefore his. This claim goes so far that the children are held responsible even for the unsavory development of the comic-book industry: "It is their [the children's] selectivity and their standards which must in turn influence the comics, whose content and standards of quality and taste are shaped to meet the customer's demand."

How much choice does a child with ten or twenty cents in his pocket have? There are many stores in town and country which have only comic books and no other printed matter except perhaps newspapers and magazines of no interest to the child. With only comic books to choose from, children really have no choice. But even if they did have a choice, the principle of leaving it entirely to them which is so vociferously promulgated by the Child Study Association of America is wrong. It is our duty to teach the child to make choices. The librarian Mrs. Sayres points out that through comic-book reading the child "loses his ability to discriminate." Of course we should try to see things from a child's point of view, but as educators and doctors we must adopt a larger view, use our own judgment and not deliver children into the hands of those who exploit their inexperience.

A pretty piece often played by the symphonette of comic-book experts is on the theme that it was always so. Children always have had these psychological needs to escape from reality and to give vent to feelings of hostility and resentment, and they used to be satisfied by fairy tales, by dime novels—even by Shakespeare. All these, the experts tell us, are just as cruel and just as violent as comic books, so why pick on comics?

They formulate this in various ways. "Children have always sought this kind of vicarious adventure. . . . Through our own dime novels, big little books and comics," says one. "Comic books [are] in a way parallel to some of the fairy tales such as *Beauty and the Beast*, *Hansel and Gretel*, and *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, all of which could be pretty scary to children," says another. Or: ". . . psychologically the comics are the modern fairy tales." Only those who do not know what is in the comic books have fallen for this, for there never has been a literature for children so enormously widespread, appealing mostly through pictures and expressing, as Dr. Richmond Barbour put it, "savagery, murder, lust and death."

After his excellent and incontrovertible description in 1940, when he found that 70 per cent of comic books contained material which no newspaper would accept, Sterling North followed up the subject eight years later. He found that the average comic book had even lower ethical, artistic and literary standards than it had in 1940. Speaking of fantasy and crime comics, he commented that they were "almost without exception" guilty of what I, in the meantime, had called "obscene glorification of violence and sadism." As a literary critic he took up this question of whether it was always so and found:

To those who insist that we older Americans also read trash in our youth, I say go back and read Horatio Alger and even the dime novels, if you wish. Edward Stratemeyer's *Rover Boys* may have seemed a trifle too pure to be credible. But the effect that had on impressionable readers was to heap scorn on the cheat and honor on the boy who

played to win but played fairly and modestly. Frank Merriwell, hero of countless tales of pluck and luck, may have been both too virtuous and too successful to be considered a probable characterization, but his influence on millions of young Americans was never such that it burdened the juvenile courts.

The trash of today is of an entirely different sort. It is even less well-written than the interminable tales of der-ring-do and virtuous adventure that filled my boyhood. And, unlike that earlier form of literature, it has added rivers of rape, arson, torture and hooded justice to youth's increasingly dim lexicon.

Marya Mannes has described how her eight-year-old son became addicted to comic books despite an abundance of good books and other entertainment in their home. "Each story," she said, "is a catalogue of force, a metronomic repetition of violence that has in it the seeds of aberration." And she added: "The reasonable may talk all they please about the lurid literature our fathers used to read in their youth; let them find examples—books widely read by the young of other generations—which can touch the comic books. . . ."

As for fairy tales, have the most cruel of them, including some of those by Grimm, been so good for children? Dr. Wilhelm Stekel wrote: "I really consider fairy-tales unsuitable for children, at least in the form which Grimm, for instance, has given them. New editions for the various age levels should be printed, in which will be eliminated, or at least modified, all that is cruel. It is not absolutely necessary for the ogre to devour his own seven children, for torture and murder to occur wholesale."

So some fairy tales are not a very good alibi. But even if they were, comic books have nothing in common with them. Fairy tales have a magic of their own which is completely absent from comic books. In comics the solution is simple, direct, mechanical and violent. Fairy tales contain emotional conflicts; they cannot be reduced to who catches whom, who knocks out

whom, who kills whom and how and who is going to torture whom. Dr. J. G. Auerbach, psychoanalyst at the Lafargue Clinic, who made comparative studies of the effect of fairy-tale and comic-book reading on children, concluded:

Why does the picture of Hansel and Gretel pushing the witch into the oven create no desire in the child for vindictive action against those who boss *him*? How does the bloody cutting open of the wolf's belly to let out Red Riding Hood's grandma differ from the knife attacks depicted in the comic books? . . . I believe the answer lies in the fantastic element of the fairy tale, which depicts a world far removed from reality. The child may identify himself with the persons or animals in this fantasy world, which he makes his own. There he may allow his fantasy to soar as he wishes: it is his private empire in which he reigns. He knows the difference between the real and the imaginary; there is no attempt to bridge the gap. Another helpful characteristic of fairy tales is their poetic form, even in prose, which also tends to remove tragedy or mischief from everyday life. The less fairy tales obey these two laws, the more they are apt to instil in the child anxiety, or a desire to translate fantasy into reality.

Children who play fairy tales would have a hard time having someone actually eat Red Riding Hood. But they can and do try to bind, gag, and stick each other with sharp instruments as they see it so realistically depicted in comic books. Comic books are not dreamlike and not symbolic. If symbolism occurs it is coarsely sexual. In comic books no one lives happily ever after, as they do in fairy tales; in comic books some characters get eliminated by force, others go on killing. "The comics may be said to offer the same type of mental catharsis to its readers that Aristotle claimed was an attribute of the drama," says one of the experts. But comic books have nothing to do with drama, with art or literature. To invoke Aristotle in their defense is like invoking Beethoven in defense of street noises.

The experts claim that comic books are no worse than dime novels were. True, dime novels were subliterary; but they were earthy and indigenous and had overtones of literature. They had echoes of James Fenimore Cooper. They taught conventional values. Their vocabulary did not even contain swear words. The hero would say "something which sounded very much like an oath." No "lousy, stinking coppers," "dirty squealers," "fat sluts," "filthy bilge-rats" or "dirty rotten scum!" They did not have psychiatrists endorsing them. It was not necessary.

Richard B. Gehman, novelist and magazine writer, had this to say in his essay "From Deadwood Dick to Superman": "[Dime novels] never glamorize the robber nor the desperado. . . . The hero's morals were impeccable. . . . The hero pulled himself up from poverty by hard work. . . . He honored and respected his parents."

A favorite argument of the comics experts goes like this: Children's troubles or delinquencies are complicated phenomena. How can you pick out only one single factor and even mention comic books? Aren't you guilty of oversimplification?

Nobody versed in clinical research would reason like that. You cannot put "factors" into a discussion of a child as you put eggs into a basket. The different factors that influence a child's life may accentuate, activate, counteract or negate one another. Or they may run side by side. You cannot at the outset reject any factor because on the surface it seems trivial. Sometimes the causes are near at hand and are overlooked for just that reason.

Of course there are other factors beside comic books. There always are other factors. That is true of tuberculosis, of syphilis, of automobile accidents. When a child reacts to something, whether it be comic books or a dog that bites him, a good doctor takes up the whole situation and does not leave out any factor, including the possibility that either the comic books or the dog may be virulent.

When it comes to prevention, the let's-not-blame-it-on-any-one-factor argument is totally inadequate. Take a tree. Its health and growth depend on many factors: its age, the soil, the water, the weather, the pruning, the nearness of other trees and vegetation, absence of injury from animals such as deer and mice and pests. All these factors combined make up the health of a tree. But when you study the health and life of trees concretely you find that one single factor, *Endothia parasitica*, regardless of all the other factors, beginning in 1904 wiped out all the native chestnut trees in the United States. The agricultural experts know that. But the comics experts would call it an "oversimplification."

Study of one factor does not obliterate the importance of other factors. On the contrary, it may highlight them. What people really mean when they use the let's-not-blame-any-one-factor argument is that they do not like this particular factor. It is new to them and for years they have been overlooking it. If they were psychoanalysts, they were caught with their couches up. They do not object to specific factors if they are intrinsic and noncommittal and can be dated far enough back in a child's life. They do not object to social factors provided they are vaguely lumped together as "environment," "our entire social fabric," "culture" or "socio-economic conditions." Comic books have been—and still are—considered beneath the dignity of scientific scrutiny and not a respectable causal factor. But science does not mean a closed system of respectable causes, it means a mind open to all potentialities.

One of the industry's experts writes: "The comic book situation acted merely as a precipitating factor in the production of symptoms by fitting the details of the child's psychic difficulties." *Merely* is the tip-off. Is it not important for us physicians if a condition which otherwise would not have broken out is "precipitated" by a psychological influence such as comic books?

In trying to deny the harm done by comic books the experts

make it appear that comic books have no influence at all and represent merely "casual contact with ideas on a printed page." But when they pronounce on the effects of "good" comic books they suddenly forget that and write that comic books "exert tremendous influence."

The experts say: "Making a scapegoat out of comic books will not solve our basic social problems." Naturally. Another says: "The comics are an outgrowth of the social unconscious." I do not believe that comic books—any more than slums—come from the "unconscious." Both are kept alive by the same social forces.

If a child has any trouble that can be traced to comic books, the experts maintain that this child was "predisposed" or "unstable" beforehand. Of course this is a diagnosis made only after the child got into trouble. It amounts to no more than saying that the comic books are good and the children bad. I believe it is the other way around—that the children are good and the comics bad.

To blame everything on "predisposition" or a supposedly pre-existing "emotional disorder" means of course to deny the role of temptation and seduction. According to the experts, the trouble is always *in the child*, and not in the comic books. The fault is always in the child's mind, and not in the invasion of that child's mind from outside.

The experts say that only abnormal children are affected by comic books while normal children are supposed to be immune. If abnormality is defined with any degree of psychiatric accuracy, the opposite is true. Many severely abnormal children are not affected by comic books. They are wrapped up in their own morbid fantasies and imaginations.

The experts like to invoke early infantile experiences and say that what is pontifically called the "character structure" of the child is laid down finally in the first few years of life and therefore cannot be deflected later by such trivial things as comic books. Yet in their writings I have not found a single case of

comic-book inspired nightmares, behavior disorders or delinquency where, by analysis, the comic books as etiological factor were disproved and causation by infantile experience was proved.

A child is not a stereotype of his own past. To blame everything on very early infantile experiences is not scientific but exorcistic thinking: Nothing could harm a child unless the devil was already in him. Comic books do their harm early enough. Children of three or four have been seen poring over the worst. Freud would not have considered that too late for harm to be done.

The idea that all children's difficulties begin and end with their very early family relationships has placed an enormous emotional burden on mothers. When children read comic books excessively, seduced by their ubiquity, their covers and their sex appeal, the experts tell us that it is also up to the parents. They are supposed to regard excessive comic-book reading as a danger signal, a "symptom of disturbance," "not to control or limit his reading" but to look for causes in the child and even seek "psychiatric help." If only half of the excessive comic-book readers were sent to mental hygiene clinics, some of which already have a waiting list for a year or more, these clinics would be occupied with only this for a century.

A star argument is that whatever a child does, he would have done anyhow, even if there were no comic books. With such an argument—if it is an argument—you can condone anything. It is true that many children read comic books and few become delinquent. But that proves nothing. Innumerable poor people never commit a crime and yet poverty is one of the causes of crime. Many children are exposed to the polio virus; few come down with the disease. Is that supposed to prove that the polio virus is innocuous and the children at fault?

Take the fourteen-year-old Chicago boy who strangled an eight-year-old girl. He left fifty crime comic books in the room with his dead victim. They depicted all kinds of ways of abus-

ing girls and killing people, including strangling. The experts want us to assume that this is a mere coincidence, that the similarity between the details in the comics and the details of the deed committed have to be ignored, and that what we must look for instead are "far deeper" causes!

The causes of children's delinquencies are not like stones that fall into water. There is a delicate balance between impulse, rationalization and inhibition; temptation, seduction and opportunity; imitation, morality and guilt feelings; fantasy, self-control and a final precipitating factor.

The most insidious thesis of the experts is that comic books "serve as a release for children's feelings of aggression." Children, so the stereotyped argument runs, need vicarious violence to overcome frustration through aggression. If comic books make people get rid of their aggressions, why are millions of them given to young soldiers at the front whom we want to be aggressive? Comic books help people to get rid not of their aggressions, but of their inhibitions.

The experts not only justify sadism but advise it. One of them, a child psychiatrist, writes: "In general we have offered to the strip writer the following advice: 'Actual mutilation . . . should not occur . . . unless the situation can be morally justified. . . . If such an act is committed by some fanciful primitive or by some enemy character it can be more readily accepted and used by the child.'" In its long and tortuous history, psychiatry has never reached a lower point of morality than this "advice" by a psychiatric defender of comic books.

The getting-rid-of-aggression-by-comic-books argument has no clinical basis. The children with the most aggressive or violent fantasies or behavior are usually the most habitual readers of violent comic books. Running away from home is one of the most typically aggressive acts of children. I have seen many children between the ages of eight and twelve who ran away and who were found "with a stack of comic books."

The crudity of the experts' reasoning corresponds to the

crudity of the comic books. The concept of the release of aggression is applied far too mechanically. It would have to be shown in the individual case that aggressive tendencies are pent up or dammed up, thwarted or repressed. In young children one can sometimes determine that by the Dues Test. The next step is to find out whether blood, horror and violence are of any use in such a situation. We have found that they are not. Children do not need just an outlet, anyway; what they need is guidance to understanding, substitution and sublimation. Far from giving release, comic books make violence and brutality seem natural to children. Comic books give release to only one aggression—that of the comic-book industry.

A number of years ago I had to examine a young man in jail in order to give an expert opinion about his sanity. He was in serious trouble, being accused of attempted rape. He had enticed a girl to walk with him past a vacant lot, had suddenly pounced on her and struggled with her. The girl had stated that there was no actual rape and that she got away from him bruised and with her clothes torn. I told him that I wanted to know more about his life and he told me the story.

Since childhood he had had fantasies of taking a girl and tying her up, especially tying her hands behind her. It started when he was about eleven and saw pictures of that in comic books. Then he looked for comic books where that was especially depicted, for example, those with girls tied in chairs with their hands fastened behind their backs. He cut out pictures and also drew them. They gave him sexual fulfillment. He had no intention of raping the girl, an act of which he would have been less ashamed. What he wanted was just to tie her up. The struggle to do it had given him full sexual satisfaction. This was one of the cases that made me resolve to study the comic-book question systematically.

We seem to have made a fetish of violence. A pamphlet distributed by the Child Study Association of America contains this outlandish statement: "Actually, hitting is one of the ways

in which children learn to get along together.” At a meeting of the National Conference of Social Work, the statement was made: “Brutality has always been a part of children’s literature and life. . . . If your child destroys your furniture while imitating Superman or Captain Marvel, he’s being motivated by impulses we shall need more of, if the world is to survive—the impulse to annihilate an evil.” The speaker did not explain what was so evil about the furniture.

Almost a decade after his first study, Sterling North wrote: “I have yet to see a clear, convincing, logical proof of the harmlessness of comics from any psychiatrist or psychoanalyst—even those to be found on the payrolls of the comic magazines, where their true function is usually hidden under some such euphemism as ‘consulting editor.’” One can sum up the scientific writings of the defense experts by saying that their relationship to real science is like the relationship of comic books to real literature. Since they think so highly of comic books, this comparison should be no offense to them.

We could learn from the specialists in agriculture. They teach you to let all plants and trees grow to their optimal development. They do not compromise with anything that might conceivably harm crops and they try to prevent harm by spraying trees early. They do not try to find something good in anything that interferes with growth; they do not say there must have been something wrong beforehand; they teach you how to cultivate the soil scientifically. They would know how to deal with the comic-book pest.

Psychiatry, I think, should be a science of the positive health of the mind. Its aim should be to help the individual to develop his true personality. It is not enough for a psychiatrist to say that he has not found that comic books cause nightmares, anxieties, morbid fantasies or violent acts, and that therefore they must be wholesome for children. Mental health has positive signs. A child needs positive factors: He needs ethical principles to live by, he needs the concept and experience of

loyalty and solidarity, of beauty, constructiveness and productiveness, creative expression, the spirit of the family and love. If that is interfered with, his positive mental health has been harmed, whether he has symptoms or not. All these positive factors are absent from crime comics. If a rosebush should produce twelve buds and only one blossoms, the bush is not healthy and it is up to us to find out what is interfering with its growth. The chief content of a child's life is growth and learning. No positive science of mental health is possible if it permits such interference as the mass onslaught of comic books.

The Upas Tree

Making and Makers of Comic Books

*“Through its bark the midday sun
Makes the fluid poison run,
And darkness of the night conceals
When the poison pitch congeals.”*

—Pushkin: “The Upas Tree”

“This boundless upas, this all-blasting tree.”

—Lord Byron

Crime comic books are showered upon us in abundance. What is the tree on which this fruit grows? After the most careful study for many years I have come to the conclusion that it is not a tree which only occasionally bears poisonous fruit, but one whose very sap is poisonous.

Early in our investigation it became clear to me and my associates as we were analyzing the comic books themselves and their reflection in the minds of every type of child, that we should also have to study the making and the makers of crime comics. So for years we have taken every opportunity that offered, and created many opportunities ourselves. We have talked with publishers, writers, artists, middlemen between comic books and radio and television, publicity agents, lawyers whom manufacturers of crime comic books consulted, members of financially related industries such as the pulp paper industry or publishers of erotic magazines or books, technical and office employees. Some of them were very co-operative, especially when they talked about other firms than their own. And we noticed that the lower down we went on the financial-returns ladder of the industry, the more critical the employees were of the wares turned out. Most of them know very well what they are doing.

A penologist and writer, David Dressler, after making a survey of comic books and their makers, wrote: "At least this much ought to be accepted as fact: There are objectionable comic books. The publishers know it. The editors want it." He "questioned people who would be expected to take a view opposed to Dr. Wertham's—publishers and editors of comic books. Many insisted . . . that the publications of *some other house* definitely portrayed sex deviation." One of them told Dressler, "These other fellows, they know exactly what they're doing. . . . I don't know how they can look at themselves in a mirror."

Some of those connected with the industry in one way or another were kind enough to write me long letters, giving data

and their own deductions. Others permitted me to take notes, sometimes even with a stenographer.

Although I am a psychiatrist—or maybe just because I am a psychiatrist who recognizes a social, scientific problem when he sees one—I was not interested in personalities. In this story, there are no single villains whose character would explain the picture as a whole.

One of the experts for the defense has said aptly that comic books “came upon us silently.” That is exactly what happened. Children were reading crime comic books for years, millions of them, while parents, teachers and mental hygienists thought they were occupied with humorous reading. When Sterling North, and later the Lafargue group, drew attention to their real content and meaning, parents were confronted with a phenomenon for which nothing in their experience had prepared them. It is precisely at this point that the comic-book manufacturers did a magnificent job—in public relations. One publisher stated publicly: “Criticize the comics as much as you wish. We like to have you talk about them.” And they proceeded to instill into mothers what they *should* think. Never before have child psychiatry, mental hygiene and child psychology been used with less substance and with more success in the interest of an industry. Comic-book publishers put out statements of their own or quoted statements of their hired experts with supreme disregard for the fact that the very excess of their wording or the very inconsistency of their arguments might be detected. They supplemented the mass appeal of their product with the mass appeal of their pseudoscientific demagoguery. Here are three typical examples:

The studies of my group have shown us conclusively that children who read good books in their comic-book deformation do not proceed to read them in the original; on the contrary, they are deterred from that. Librarians all over the country have borne that out. Yet a comic-book publisher stated publicly that children who read classics in comic-book form “go

on to read the *complete* story in its entirety." The phrasing alone gives away the intent.

Or a publisher quotes publicly the statement of one of the experts for the defense that children read comic books because of "the satisfaction of some real innermost need of their own." Again the wording is interesting. If it is really a *need*, why must it be a *real* need, and if it is a real need, why must it be an *innermost* need, and if it is an honest-to-goodness real innermost need, why the addition of *their own*?

Another publisher repeats publicly that juvenile delinquency is "far too complex" for such a simple thing as crime comic books to play any part in it. At the same time, in complete disregard for the intelligence of his readers or listeners, he states that his own crime comic books are "responsible for lessening juvenile delinquency."

The behavior of crime-comic-book publishers has some resemblance to the plots of their products: pious slogans and ruthless actions. After I had examined many comic books and their effect on many children I arrived at the formula which my further studies have confirmed, that crime comics represent an obscene glorification of violence, crime and sadism. This is not a characterization of some, but the formula of the bulk. It would therefore be incorrect and unjust to say that one crime-comic-book representative is more irresponsible than the other. Their common prayer seems to be: Suffer the little children to come unto me and I shall lead them into temptation.

From innumerable talks with children I got this image. Picture to yourself a typical American boy of nine or ten walking along the street. In his pocket is his spending money, or his weekly allowance, or his lunch money, or his movie money or candy money, or some of his saved money, or part of his earnings from after-school work or from a birthday or Christmas gift. A very small group of men is lurking behind him intent on getting most of that money away from him. They want even more than the money he has. They tempt him, they lure him,

they show him how to steal, how to break into houses through the windows and how to sell stolen goods. They even sell him the weapons—guns and knives. The profits from all this run into tens of millions of dollars. What do the children get in return? The Child Study Association of America says that they get “escape”; but what they really get is entrapment. They get no literary values they can take along into life, but merely temptation, corruption, and demoralization.

Men who guard a public building have to undergo a civil service examination, but anybody can become a crime-comic-book publisher and become part of an industry that at the present time has greater and more widespread influence on children in town and country than any other public or private agency. All he needs is enough capital to buy a special printing press, employ a good circulation manager, a shrewd editor, some hack writers, letterers and cartoonists and a few child experts to endorse his product. We have been told that he will get as much as 40 per cent return on his investment.

If you want to compare this with what the child receives for his ten cents in economic terms, buy a copy of a pocket magazine for adults which also costs ten cents. They are printed on excellent paper, they have many good photographs well reproduced, good reporting, alert editing, a great variety of subject matter. And yet their circulation is small compared to that of comic books. Moreover, the old or return copies of these magazines are valueless, whereas comic books continue to be sold, shipped abroad, traded secondhand, borrowed and studied, as long as they hold together. Old comic books never die; they just trade away. Just as children were taken advantage of in the field of physical labor, so now they are taken advantage of economically, as a market. In the matter of reading the adults get the best, the children the worst.

Against the child is concentrated the economic power of a large industry. It has been estimated that a third of all cheap pulp made in the United States and Canada is used by comic-

book publishers. Even granting that many adults read these comic books, the proportion of adult and child readers is such that over a million dollars a week is taken out of the pockets of children.

We have found that the individual child spends much more money on crime comic books than adults familiar with their circumstances would assume.

I have seen many children who have spent over fifty dollars a year on crime comic books, more often than not without their parents' knowledge. Occasionally parents realize it to some extent. One alert parent wrote me: "This form of literature drains my children's pocket money." In one of the most critical surveys, made on 450 pupils in grades 4 to 6, it was found that the average child read 14.5 comic books a week. Two children claimed that they read a hundred a week.

The actual cost of production varies. Some books have royalties attached to them. A small comic book, such as one that Columbia University Press got out for educational purposes, costs about one and one half cents, but if done less carefully could be done for three fourths of a cent. A sixteen-page comic book such as those used for advertising or in politics costs no more than two and one fourth cents for an average edition of 650,000. The profits from comic books and the revenue from advertising in them are staggering. Crime does not pay, but crime comics do.

If I were asked what I have found to be the outstanding characteristic of the crime-comic-book publishers, I would say it is their anonymity, or semi-anonymity. This was an unexpected phenomenon. There are at present seventy-six major juvenile-book publishers. Their children's books bear the imprint of their firm. But with crime-comic-book publishers, mass purveyors of children's literature, you can't be sure who publishes what. A parent who would look casually over his child's comic books would think that almost every book has its own publisher. Actually a very small number of firms puts out most

of the comic books, but does so under various names. Different reasons are given for this concealment. Income-tax policy is one of them. The fear of compromising the name of a whole firm by objectionable products is another. I like to think that some of the biggest publishers are ashamed to have their real trade names appear on such products.

Sometimes the publisher's name on the comic book and the name and contents of the book show a ludicrous discrepancy. For instance, one of the 1952 crop has on its first page a horrible picture of a man shot in the stomach, with a face of agonized pain, and such dialogue as: "You know as well as I do that any water he'd drink'd pour right out of his gut! It'd be MURDER!" The name of the publisher is: Tiny Tots Comics, Inc.

The names of comic books and their numbering are sometimes also anything but informative. If one comic book is criticized, the publishers may stop the series and start the same thing again with another title. If a comic book is designated No. 17 or No. 60 or No. 15 it may actually be No. 1 of that title. This I am told has something to do with Post Office regulations according to which they may change the name but must keep the number, to keep some sort of connection with the former product. So *Crime* may become *Love*; *Outer Space*, the *Jungle*; *Perfect Crime*, *War*; *Romance*, *Science Fiction*; *Young Love*, *Horror*; while the numbers remain consecutive.

After we had once penetrated the fog of "nameless horrors" and equally nameless publishers, we arrived at a simple, irrefutable conclusion: some of the biggest crime-comic-book publishers get out the worst and the most widely read comics. The little fellows, far from being more irresponsible, make an effort once in a while to get out less objectionable comics. But they have to return to the formula or, as some have done, give up publishing crime comics entirely. This is of course just the opposite of what many sincere adults have been led to believe.

Some comic-book firms are connected with related enterprises such as paper mills. Some firms of course publish other

things beside comic books. A firm which published a family magazine published also what the *New Yorker* generously called "high-toned monthly comic books." Some firms published a national magazine on the one hand and some of the worst crime comics on the other, the readers of one part of this enterprise not knowing about the other.

From the point of view of the scientific study of the crime comic book as a social phenomenon, these connections are not without significance. National magazines whose publishers also publish comic books do not as a rule print articles critical of comic books. Several times we had a chance to see how this works. A writer asked the Lafargue group to give him some background material for an article on violence in children. We gave him some of our conclusions, including some of the lessons in violence in comic books, which he incorporated in his article. When he told me which national magazine he was doing the article for, I told him that since its publisher also published comic books his article would not be published there. He did not believe that such censorship existed. His article was never printed.

As a psychiatrist I was interested in what some of these publishers did before they published comic books for children. Some of them published semipornographic literature for adults.

The type of cynicism that we found in the dialogue of comic books parallels some of the published statements that comic-book publishers and their representatives have made off and on when confronted with public opinion. These are some examples:

"There are more morons than people, you know."

"I don't think comics hurt children because they grow out of it."

"Sure there is violence in comics. It's all over English literature, too. Look at *Hamlet*. Look at Sir Walter Scott's novels."

"I don't see a child getting sexual stimulation out of it. Look-

ing at those enlarged mammary glands he'd remember that not long ago he was nursing at his mother's breast."

"We do it by formula, not malice. A cop, a killer, a gun and a girl."

Utterances of the editors are no less cynical. Richard B. Gehman, in "From Deadwood Dick to Superman," quoted one: "Naturally after a kid has identified himself with the crook in the beginning, and after he's followed him through various adventures, he's going to be a little sorry when the crook gets shot. Sure he'll resent the officer who does the shooting. Maybe he'll resent all cops. But what the hell, they sell. Kids like them."

The editor of the comic book *The Killers* and other similar ones said with disarming frankness: "The so-called harmless books just don't sell."

Another editor: "We are not selling books on the basis of bosoms and blood. We are business men who can't be expected to protect maladjusted children."

From my talks with editors and with those who work under them, it seems to me that they have three main tasks. They call a writer for a story, and often give him a check even before he writes it. They determine what are the "real innermost needs" of children. Thirdly, they watch public reaction to the small extent that this is necessary. When the editor receives a copy after the pencil-man, the ink-man and the letterer have done their work, he—thinking of course of the "needs" of the child—"makes final corrections, changing a word of dialogue or indicating in the margin that a girl's half-torn dress should show more of her left breast" (Gehman).

I learned that editors read some of my writings on comic books and discussed them at staff conferences. They reasoned that they did not have to worry too much and that public reaction against crime comic books would soon subside. I know of one company where the editor took my findings very seriously and tried to clean up his crime comic books—and finally gave them up altogether as the only way to do it. This

company published an educational comic book which was a financial flop and was discontinued. That is not so hard to explain. Suppose you give a man a highball for breakfast, two highballs for lunch, three highballs for dinner and some strong brandy in between. All the while you keep telling those with whom he lives that this is being done to satisfy his "innermost needs," help him get rid of his "aggressions" and give him a chance to "escape from the humdrum of his life." Would you expect him to be a good prospect for buying regularly tomato juice, ginger ale or milk?

The distribution of comic books is an extended and efficient operation. The wholesale distributors furnish them to newsstands, confectionery stores and many other places. Some newsstands receive shipments of from fifty to one hundred comic books every second day, others restock every two or three days with more than five hundred comic books. Millions of comic books are returned and their distribution is in itself a big industry. Their front covers are torn off, or they are otherwise marked, and they are sent to Europe or North Africa—everywhere except to countries which guard their children against them by bans on importation. That they are sold in countries where the children cannot read English shows that they do not need words and that children "read" them just from the pictures.

My associates and I have spoken to many vendors. And very many of them do not like to sell crime comic books. They know they are not good for children and they would rather not handle them. The president of the Atlantic Coast Independent Distributors Association has estimated that three fourths of comic books are not "worthy of distribution" and the president of the National Association of Retail Druggists said at a convention: "It is a tragic fact that many retail druggists are peddlers of gutter muck. The charge can be held against them with justice; their only defense is that it has never occurred to them to check on the comic books."

When parents critical of comic books have realized how defenseless they are against them they have made two unreasonable demands of vendors in stands or stores. First they have asked them to read the comic books before they sell them! That is of course impossible, just as it is impossible for a busy housewife to read all her children's comic books first, though that has been suggested by some experts.

The second demand is that the small vendor should reject the most bloody and sadistic comics. But is it fair to ask these economically hard-pressed people to eliminate those comic books that sell best, when nothing is done at their source?

Comic books that don't "move" are a great headache to the small vendor. If he doesn't return them he has to pay for them. But returning them makes a lot of work bookkeeping, so sometimes he just keeps them and tries to sell them.

A number of these small storekeepers who know a lot about children's comic-book habits have given us valuable hints in the course of our studies. One man who owns a small stationery store told us that he sells many classic comic books. "The school is right next door. The kids come in and use them for their book reports." He also handles a lot of twenty-five-cent pocket books, but has no classics in those editions. "The children don't buy them as long as comic books exist." As for the business aspects, he makes five cents on each pocket book, a cent and three quarters on the classics comics and two and a half cents on a crime comic book.

I found a good opportunity to study what one might call the cultural role of comic books in small stores in very poor neighborhoods where immigrants or migrating minorities have moved into a section of the city. For example in a small candy store frequented almost entirely by Puerto Ricans who had moved into the district there is no other reading matter aside from comic books. But of them there is a large secondhand supply limited to the violent and gruesome and sexy kinds. There are always children around, including very young ones,

and this is their first contact with American culture. They cannot even speak English, so of course they only look at the pictures. They have not yet heard that the experts of the comic-book industry have found that comic books teach literacy, so they don't learn to read from them. But here their little money is taken away from them. Late in the evening, and into the night, children collect at this store, which is also a place for that much hushed-up phenomenon child prostitution of the youngest and lowest-paid kind.

Many vendors objected to the block system of purchasing comic books. Again and again they have told me, "I have to sell comic books, although I don't want to. Otherwise I don't get any magazines." Or: "I have no choice. I am entirely dependent on block booking." The secretary of the Arizona Pharmaceutical Association has stated: "The druggists have not been selling these because of the profit. We have been compelled to take them to get the other magazines of the better class. Cases have been found wherein druggists who refused to accept certain comics found their supply of higher class popular magazines cut in half."

The proprietor of a small bookshop in New Jersey who had some good books on his shelves also carried a lot of crime comic books. When I asked him about it, he said, "I want to carry good pocket-size magazines for adults. The dealer said No, unless I took his comic books. I kept after him and then he reluctantly said I could have them, but I would have to fetch them myself. I would phone; then he would say, they are not in yet; then I would phone again and he would say they are all sold out. So—I sell comic books." When the comic-book industry raises the cry of civil liberties and freedom of speech in connection with guarding children against the worst of the crime comic books, I am always reminded of the plight of these small business people who are forced to do something wrong which they do not want to do. The comic-book industry certainly does not give them freedom.

Actually these small dealers live in fear and do not want their names revealed. For example, I received a petition signed by six people, sent to me in the mistaken belief that I had some influence. "We are taking the liberty of writing to you as my friends and I have a problem which we do not know how to attack. The subject matter of the problem is such that we cannot take it to our ministers, as it is a delicate subject and one which we know has to be corrected at its source. . . . Our druggist says that he is dictated to in the matter of buying magazines for the reading public. He wished to dispose of some comic books, the tone of which he did not like, but was told that unless he bought all that the publishers offer he could not buy the magazines he wished. In a free country why does this have to be? Who is doing the dictating? . . . I would like to ask, what is happening? . . . We cannot stand by and see this happen. . . . Please don't use our names . . . We don't want any libel trouble. . . ."

The writers of comic books rarely want to be professional crime-comic-book writers. I have had letters from them and have spoken with a number of them. One firm may employ as many as twenty or thirty such writers. Their ambition is to write a "Profile" for the *New Yorker*, or articles or stories for national magazines, or to write the great American novel. The scripts or scenarios they write for comic books are not anything which they wish to express or anything they wish to convey to their child public. They want to get their ten dollars a page and pay the rent. They do not write comic-book stories for artistic or emotional self-expression. On the contrary, they write them in the hope of finding eventually the chance for self-expression somewhere else.

The ideas for their stories they get from anywhere, from other comic books, from newspapers, movies, radio, even jokes. Believe it or not, some comic-book writers are good writers. And the paradox or the tragedy is that when you read a comic-book story that is a little better it does not mean that a bad

writer has improved, but that a man who was a good writer had to debase himself. Crime-comic-book writers should not be blamed for comic books. They are not free men. They are told what to do and they do it—or else. They often are, I have found, very critical of comics. They are the ones who really know what goes into them. They know the degenerate talk that goes on in some editorial offices. But of course, like comic-book vendors, they have to be afraid of the ruthless economic power of the comic-book industry. In every letter I have received from a writer, stress is laid on requests to keep his identity secret. I have one letter from a man, evidently a very intelligent writer, who mentions this three times in one letter!

There has been a great critical outburst about the ex-comic-book writer Mickey Spillane and his fictional hero. Spillane has sold some twenty million pocket-book copies. The critics object to his artless cynicism, his bloody sadism, his debasement of women. To me this criticism seems to be sheer hypocrisy. Mickey Spillane writes for adults and mostly for young adults who have been brought up on crime comic books. Why is Spillane with his paltry twenty million copies for adults more important than exactly the same thing—with colored illustrations—in hundreds of millions of comic books for children?

Malcolm Cowley has written an excellent analysis of Mickey Spillane. "Mike Hammer," he says, "takes a peculiar delight in shooting women in the abdomen"; "the characters have no emotions except hatred, lust and fear"; "sometimes in the story the fierce joys of sadism give way to the subtler delights of masochism"; "soon he is back in the high-powered car, ready to visit another incredibly seductive woman and start a new episode"; "he has strong homosexual tendencies." But all this is old stuff to American children. The abdomen is where you shoot a woman—if you don't shoot her in the back. You kick a man in the face, or shoot him in the eye. And there is always a new episode coming up. This is the freedom of speech that the in-

dustry invokes when parents try to protect their children from crime comics.

If I were asked to express in a single sentence what has happened mentally to many American children during the last decade I would know no better formula than to say that they were conquered by Superman. And if I were further asked what is the real moral of the Superman story, I would know no better answer than the fate of the creator of Superman himself.

John Kobler has written one of his magazine articles about the rise of Superman. It has a photograph of Jerry Siegal, inventor of Superman, lying on an oversized, luxuriously accoutred bed with silken covers, in a room adorned with draperies. Here indeed is success. Kobler describes how Superman knocks out an endless procession of evildoers. "When a gangster rams Superman on the skull with a crowbar, the crowbar rebounds and shatters his own noggin." Kobler does not fail to point out that Superman comes to children highly recommended. A child psychiatrist declared that Superman "provides an inexpensive form of therapy for unhappy children." So Superman and his inventor were well launched.

Since then, in the course of our studies, we have often seen troubled children, children in trouble and children crushed by society's punishments, with Superman and Superboy comic books sticking out of their pockets.

How did the Superman formula work for his creator? The success formula he developed did not work for him. Superman flies high in comic books and on TV; but his creator has long since been left behind.

I am told that if I were to visit the National Cartoonists Society my reception there would lack chumminess. In fact, collectively they consider me to be a devil with two horns. Actually, when we extended our studies to include artists who make drawings for crime comic books, far from blaming them we found that they are victims too. I doubt whether there are any artists doing this work whose life ambition was to draw

for crime comic books. From interviews, telephone calls and letters we found out that they are afraid too. This is the kind of thing I was told: "Please don't mention that I even spoke to you! I'd be blackballed; I'd be ruined!" Here I found the comic-book industry's conception of freedom of speech again. It is a strange part of the comic-book industry that its vendors, writers and artists are so afraid. Maybe they should take the advice of the industry's experts and read horror or supermen comics to get rid of their fears.

Quite a few of the members of the National Cartoonists Society draw for comic books. By and large it pays well, but it is not their artistic ambition. As a rule they are highly critical of what is drawn, by themselves and by their colleagues, for crime comics. One famous comics artist told me, "Of course you have to keep my name confidential—but if I were you there are four hundred comic books I'd like to have taken off the stands." Ray Abel, an illustrator of children's books, is quoted by the Wilson Library Bulletin: "As for the comic book illustrator, I can speak for him, too, as I have done a few comic books in my time. There creative ability and imagination, the things that make an art form interesting, are completely blocked. The artist is a machine and his only aim is to attain a mechanical competence that will make him completely undistinguishable from the other 'machines' in the business. No, I can't say anything in favor of comic books."

The industry and defenders of comics like to mix up comic books and newspaper comic *strips* in the mind of the public. There are of course financial relationships. Some comic strips are made into comic books. A national weekly containing newspaper comic strips finances research on "comics" (which comes out favorable to crime comic books). Comic-book artists know that, as Stanley Baer ("The Toodles") expressed it in a radio forum at Northwestern University, "the syndicates as well as the feature editors of the various newspapers watch the strips very carefully. And it isn't the newspaper strips that are the ones that

are severely criticized." E. Bushmiller ("Nancy") told the San Diego County Women's Clubs, "I wish you would differentiate between the newspaper comics and the comic books. Most newspaper comics are wholesome, but a large percentage of the comic books are cheap junk and just turned out for a quick sale."

It is in an artistic sense that these artists are victims. I know that quite a number of them are highly gifted; but they have to turn out an inartistic assembly-line product. That is what is essentially wrong with comic books: There are too many pictures. The mass effect of these stereotyped, standardized images is something totally different from and much inferior to the well-spaced illustrations in a good children's book. Instead of helping a child to develop his artistic imagination, they stifle it. Even if the drawings were good, which they are not, their numbers would kill their artistic effect.

Some artists have told me that they earn or did earn more money from crime comic books than from any other art work. But they realize very well that it does not help their artistic development. Aline B. Louchheim, reviewing an exhibition of the National Cartoonists Society, placed the political, gag and humorous cartoonists much higher than the comic-book artists. "Let us admit it," she wrote, "the general level of drawing is appallingly low. . . . Even the superb brickbat Krazy Kat tradition is gone."

Whenever the question of control of crime comics is raised, the industry starts to fuss about freedom of expression. It is only when one talks to artists and writers of comic books that one realizes fully the sham of this argument. Who wants to express what in this medium? The writers tell you frankly that what they want is to satisfy the editor—to get their check. If they want to express something, as many of them do, they want to do it in a "legitimate medium." Text and drawings of crime comics are concocted, not created. And there is no freedom of concoction. One comic-book artist told me: "I feel very much like you do about the crime stuff. I did most of my work

on assignment. They tell me: 'We want blood.' I used to get very much disturbed about it. They criticized my drawings because they were not sexy enough. My instructions were to make these drawings as sexy as possible. They told me to show as much as possible. For example, I had to draw two women fighting showing as much of the thighs as possible, seductive poses, cruel faces, and one or both flailing the air with a long blunt club. Or two men wrestling, or a man and a gorilla. Thigh muscles must be emphasized and emphasis on all body proportions—you know what I mean."

He added that after these drawings were used in crime-comic books they were printed and catalogued according to sex and action and then sold to private customers who had strange erotic desires, for very personal reasons. Some wanted men, some wanted women, some wanted thighs, etc. All this was taken from drawings for comic books for children!

Experts for the defense are just as necessary for the industry as writers or artists. It could not possibly exist in its present form or extent without them. They are a commercial necessity. The many publishers of genuine children's books do not employ such experts. They do not need them. Neither do they need codes, codes forbidding—after years of publishing—blood, sadism, sex perversion, race hatred and so on. Nor do they need endorsements on their books. Were it not for the confusion spread so adroitly by the comics experts, the good sense of mothers would have swept away both the product and the pretense. The more we studied the industry, the more it was impressed upon us that it was mainly *via* the experts that the crime-comic-book industry has established such a firm hold on our social fabric. Nobody can understand the industry who does not understand that part of the problem.

I have sometimes indulged in the fantasy that I am at the gate of Heaven. St. Peter questions me about what good I have done on earth. I reply proudly that I have read and analyzed thousands of comic books—a horrible task and really a labor of

love. "That counts for nothing," says St. Peter. "Millions of children read these comic books." "Well," I reply, "I have also read all the articles and speeches and press releases by the experts for the defense." "Okay," says St. Peter. "Come in! You deserve it."

Every medium of artistic and literary expression has developed professional critics: painting, sculpture, drama, the novel, the detective story, the seven lively arts, musical recordings, television, children's books. The fact that comic books have grown to some ninety millions a month without developing such critics is one more indication that this industry functions in a cultural vacuum. Literary critics evidently thought that these accumulations of bad pictures and bad drawing were beneath critical notice. I have convinced myself often that they were ignorant of the material itself unless it was brought home to them in their own families.

One literary critic had been very permissive about comic books and had not included them in his other excellent critiques of life and literature. He changed his mind one evening when after reprimanding his children, aged seven and five, he overheard the older saying to the younger: "Don't worry. In the morning I kill both of them!"

There have been other excellent critics, but they came later. Marya Mannes has expressed her opinion tersely: "Comic books kill dreams." She discerned the monopoly position comic books had obtained among the educationally less privileged: "In one out of three American homes, comic books are virtually the only reading matter." John Mason Brown had this to say: "The comic books as they are now perpetually on tap seem to me to be not only trash but the lowest, most despicable and most harmful and unethical form of trash." When heckled by a comic-book publisher about what his own children think of his opinion, he made the classical reply: "They have been so corrupted by you that they love them."

The closest critics of the poison tree should be the parents. Gilbert Seldes has correctly seen as a key problem of comic books "the paralysis of the parents." In his recent book *The Great Audience* he says: ". . . unlike the other mass media, comics have almost no esthetic interest." (I would question his "almost.") After quoting testimony that connects comic books with delinquency and evidence of their brutality and unwholesomeness he goes on: "Most of these outcries represent the attitudes of parents searching for a way to cope with a powerful business enterprise which they consider positively evil. . . . The liberal-minded citizen dislikes coercive action, tries to escape from corruption privately, and discovers that his neighbor, his community, are affected. . . . Year after year Dr. Fredric Wertham brings forth panels showing new ugliness and sadistic atrocities; year after year his testimony is brushed aside as extravagant and out-of-date. The paralysis of the parent is almost complete."

What causes this paralysis of parents? I do not think it is a real paralysis; it is helplessness. The vast majority of mothers have been outraged when they read the crime comic books their children read. But the moment they raise their voices they are knocked out by the experts for the defense and by an avalanche of pseudo-Freudian lore. Freud himself never saw a comic book. And I am certain that he would have been horrified—and even more horrified to learn that his name is being used to defend them by some uncritical would-be followers.

The mothers are not complacent. They are put in a difficult position. They have been told not to worry about comic books, but to read them aloud with their children. Let's go along with Mrs. Jones as she tries to follow this advice. Her son is seven years old, so she selects a comic book which is obviously for children: it has full-page advertisements showing forty-four smiling and happy children's faces. This, she thinks, must be just the thing to read aloud to her child. So she starts with the cover, *The Battle of the Monsters!* She describes the cover to

her son. It shows an enormous bestial colored human being who is brandishing a club and carrying off a scared blonde little boy in knee pants. Then she goes on to the first story:

“LOOK!! Their bodies are CRUMBLING AWAY!!”

“KILL! K—AARGHH!”

“YAIEE—E—E!!”

Mamma has some difficulty in pronouncing these speeches. But her difficulties increase when in the course of the story a man encounters a big serpent: “WH-AWWGG—HH—H!! YAAGH—H—H—H!!”

She goes on, however, and comes to a picture where a yellow-haired man mugs the dark-hued monster from behind: “AARGH—H—H!!”

Mrs. Jones thinks perhaps she had better switch to another story. So she turns a few pages and begins “Whip of Death!”

“REVENGE!”

“AIEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!”

There is a picture of a boy tied to a mast with the captain lashing him so furiously that his bare body is criss-crossed with marks. The boy dies of this beating.

Mrs. Jones gives up. She realizes that she will never comprehend the new psychology which defends comic books and she decides that if the child-psychiatry and child-guidance experts say Bobby needs this to get rid of his “aggressions” he has to go through with it alone. She can’t take it.

Suppose for a moment that a girl of nine is physically violated by an adult. Democratic justice demands the most rigorous determination: Did this violation occur? Is it established beyond a reasonable doubt that it was this adult who did it? But do we give this man the right to address the parents of the victim, expounding his view that from his investigations he has found that the girl liked it; that it satisfied a “real innermost need” of her own; that struggling against him helped her to get rid of her own “aggressions”; that in her “humdrum” home and school life this was a way of psychological “escape”

for her; and that after all, in this modern world of ours girls may get raped and he was helping her to become acquainted with and adjust to "reality"; that she will laugh it off and grow out of it; that the basic character is formed in the first few years, anyhow, so that rape when she's a little older than that can have no real effect?

This simile is not far-fetched. This is precisely what we permit the comic-book industry to do when they violate children's minds.

XI

Murder in Dawson Creek

The Comic Books Abroad

“Reputation abroad is contemporaneous posterity.”

—French saying

The Alaska Highway, which runs for some fifteen hundred miles to Fairbanks, Alaska, begins at Dawson Creek, in the Peace River district. Dawson Creek used to have about five hundred inhabitants. Then it became a boom town during the construction of the highway. Now it has settled down to about 3,800 people. The center of a famous wheat-producing agricultural area with record yields, Dawson Creek is a well-ordered community which boasts of a six-hundred-thousand-dollar high school. The farmers of the surrounding region go to the town for trade and recreation.

One evening in 1948, one of these hard-working men, Mr. James Watson, was returning in his car from a show not far from the Dew Drop Inn in Dawson Creek to his home in Kilkarren. With him were some friends and relatives. His son was driving while he, on the back seat, was holding a small child on his knees. Suddenly the occupants of the car thought they heard a loud bang like a shot. Before they could decide what it was a second shot rang out. It was about nine thirty in the evening and they couldn't see anybody. But Mr. Watson slumped over, shot through the chest. His son Fred stopped the car, still couldn't see anybody. Someone screamed. And he turned the car around and rushed the wounded man to the hospital. He died three days later.

Mr. Watson was one of the most respected residents. For some time he had been president of the Dawson Co-operative Union. He had come from the north of England and had owned his farm in the Peace River district for thirty years. Who could have murdered him, and why?

When the police traced and arrested the culprits the mystery of the motive became even greater, for they were a boy of thirteen and a boy of eleven. "This is one of the worst tragedies to come about by juvenile delinquency in this North country," one newspaper commented. The authorities, puzzled and serious, made a thorough investigation of the whole case. The boys

were turned over to the Department of Health and Welfare for study.

Neither boy had any excuses to make. They verified what the police had found and told a straightforward story. They were like amateur actors repeating as best they could remember the plot of a play they had carefully learned. They had stolen a rifle from a parked car. Then they went to the railway yards and stole cigarettes from a truck. The night before they had stolen a flashlight. The night of the murder they had proceeded along the Alaska Highway, stood in a ditch and waited for a car to come along. They were playing highwaymen. When a car did come they flagged it to stop, and fired a shot; but the car went right on. When Mr. Watson's car came along they did the same, firing a shot in the air. But when that car didn't stop either they fired right at it.

The mother of the older boy, although her son had not been in any trouble, was worried about him. She had noticed that he spent a great deal of his time reading little colored booklets all dealing with crime. Three days before the shooting she had tried to get advice as to what to do about him. The authorities had no preconceived ideas; but after investigation they all came to the same conclusion: These boys had been not only influenced, but actually motivated to the point of detailed imitation, by crime comic books. Every detail of what they did was found blueprinted in the comic books they had been reading. The older boy had read about fifty crime comic books a week, the younger boy only about thirty. They didn't see anything peculiar in that, either as something wrong or as something which could serve as an excuse. It was left to the authorities to piece it together.

This case was like an experiment. Nobody was looking for a "scapegoat." Nobody had given any thought to comic books (except the mother of one of the boys) before the murder. Nobody wanted to prove anything, except what really happened. Nobody wanted anything except the truth. The representative

of the Department of Health and Social Welfare declared as a result of his investigations that the source of the ideas possessed by these children was clearly their comic books, and he testified to the effect comic books had had on their minds. In his verdict the coroner also referred to the evidence of comic books in this case, comic books "which are apt to encourage crime."

At the trial in the juvenile court the Crown Prosecutor, Mr. A. W. McClellan, told the Court: "I feel that parents and the public generally have been on trial this afternoon as well as these two boys. . . . I have no doubt that if the public generally had been present at this trial they would have gone in a body to the purveyors of these so-called comic books and demonstrated in no uncertain terms what they thought of their pernicious influence. It is clear that in many cases parents have no idea of the effect the reading of this muck—for that is what it is—can have on the minds of children. I cannot say too strongly that I think these two unfortunate boys have been strongly influenced by what they have been reading. I would like to see a concerted effort to wipe out this horrible and weird literature with which children are filling their heads."

Juvenile Court Judge C. S. Kitchen also singled out crime comic books as the predominant factor in this tragedy. He spoke about "the influence of the literature these boys have been subjected to" and added: "I am satisfied that a concerted effort should be made to see that this worse-than-rubbish is abolished in some way."

It did not do the boys much good, but Dawson Creek had become comic-book conscious overnight.

I heard about this case right after it happened. There was nothing new about it. It was just like so many others where children had taken their roles from comic books. It was one of those cases where cause and effect were so clear that nobody dared dispute it.

Although the number of comic books in Canada is infinitely smaller than in the United States, the problem was recognized there with far more seriousness. Mrs. T. W. A. Gray, chairman of a special committee of the Victoria and District Parent-Teacher Council, was in the midst of an extensive investigation when the Watson comic-book murder was committed. To her it was another of many instances of the detrimental influence of comic books on children. She had collected cases, studied the literature, communicated with other parent-teacher organizations—eventually reaching the provincial and national level—looked into the industry and its experts, and last but not least had studied the comic books that children read. She reported these samples from one comic book:

- 1) As the American army is returning home, and the flag is going by, an old gentleman asks three men to remove their hats. They reply: "If he's so patriotic he might as well die for his country," and one of them stabs the old man to death.
- 2) An honest alderman tries to protect the public and is killed. The hero says: "Bullets are better than ballots!"
And the commentator says: "Ah! That impulsive boy! He's absolutely fearless! Why can't everyone be like that!"

Mrs. Gray did not permit herself to be sidetracked by the industry or by those who wanted her to include all kinds of other reading and entertainment. She unflinchingly isolated one evil and pursued it. Her campaign was endorsed by the British Columbia Parent-Teacher Federation and then by the National Federation of Home and School. Damning evidence against crime comic books accumulated from all over the country. There was a striking similarity in youthful delinquencies which became more violent and involved ever younger children.

My advice was sought off and on by various Canadian organizations and it was interesting to see where the chief difficulty arose in the attempt to protect children. This became part of

my own investigation of the general social aspects of the comic-book question.

Modern child psychiatry, mental hygiene and educational psychology are in a crisis. Far from being leaders, they are behind the times. Some of their literature is filled with vagaries and generalities. When confronted with a new phenomenon like comic books, they do everything except study the books. They make pronouncements without first learning the objective facts and, without bad intent, repeat the same old arguments which the crime-comic-book industry—aided by its experts—had culled from the psychological verbiage of the day.

That is precisely what happened in Canada. The parents knew there was something very wrong, teachers and others who had directly to do with children knew it, and Minister of Justice Garson, after going over a great deal of evidence, said that crime comic books are “nothing but hack-work filth.” But the leaders of mental hygiene, who stood idly by while comic books gained increasing influence over children, pooh-poohed the whole thing. It was not in Freud, it was not in mental hygiene books, and it could so easily be explained away like other social evils. The medical director of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene (Canada) told a convention: “A child may ascribe his behavior to a comic he has read or a movie he has seen. But such explanations cannot be considered scientific evidence of causation.” (Note that in Canada, as in the United States, it is not the children who “ascribe” their behavior to comic books, but those adults who really study the facts and the comic books.)

Here, it seemed to me, was one of the points where my comic-book study—just because it *was* so focussed on one element—led me to a clear perception of a much larger problem. Some modern psychiatrists and educational psychologists have done a lot of harm with their pseudoscientific drivel. In this instance, a newspaper evidently more in contact with life than the National Committee for Mental Hygiene (Canada) commented edi-

torially: "This may not be considered 'scientific evidence of causation.' It is significant to note, however, that the *Montreal Star* and the *Montreal Gazette*, commenting on the unsuccessful attempt of a ten-year-old to hang himself, both state that the youngster was imitating a scene in a comic book open beside him." And the editorial went on to mention another similar case with a fatal ending.

The same medical director wrote to a parent-teacher group the usual generalizations favoring comic books, obviously without knowing anything about them or the real effects they have on children. He asserted that only "children who are deeply disturbed, unhappy, rejected and fearful, are attracted to comics of this type." Make clear to yourself how far we have gone astray in relying on the official mental hygiene of the day if a leader makes a statement according to which tens of millions of children would have to be considered "deeply disturbed"! What an alibi for the corrupters of children! What a boon to private practice! His final pronouncement about comic books is "control by legislation is not the device of a truly democratic and mature society." If the law is not the device of a democratic society, what is? The dogma of an expert who has not studied the subject fully? Other mental-hygiene officials made similar statements.

But it was the democratic process which proved a better safeguard for truth, science and the health of children. While in the United States parents and parent-teacher associations were stalled, confused by the experts and the maneuvers of the comic-book industry, the Canadians persisted. The Parent-Teacher Association of Kamloops (B.C.) asked its representative in Parliament, Mr. Edmund Davie Fulton, to bring the matter to the attention of the House of Commons.

There were full discussions on several occasions. Mr. Fulton, rising to introduce legislation to control crime comic books, took issue with the director of research of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene (Canada), who had wired the Minister of

Justice to say that legal banning would be a confession of failure on the part of parents and educators to raise the child.

"That may be true," Mr. Fulton said, "but from all those who have spoken to me and from articles I have read I know that parents and teachers are literally at their wits' ends to find a solution. . . . They are powerless to prevent the tremendous circulation of these crime comics."

The member from Kamloops, who had accumulated a great deal of material (including some of mine) won the respect of everybody by making his points very definitely and precisely. He clearly separated comic books from newspaper comic strips; he concentrated on crime comic books and did not let himself get inveigled into talking about movies or other things; he did not include only the current crop but mentioned the harm already done and continuing to be done by the old ones. In the course of various speeches in the House of Commons, he gave credit to the many parents', women's and teachers' organizations. He said:

The man of violence is portrayed as acting directly, quickly and forcefully. In this way the sympathies of children are directed toward the wrong side.

Even if there were only one case of a crime, the commission of which was influenced by crime comics, even if the enactment of the bill only prevented one murder, one crime of violence being committed by a juvenile, I would say that the act, if passed, would have served its purpose.

I have received many communications from humble men and women, parents who were desperately concerned with the welfare of their children, and conversations I have had with those parents moved me greatly. I know the deep anxiety with which mothers and fathers have viewed this matter, recognizing in it a frightful threat to which their children have been exposed. It was an exposure which was beyond parental control, because these crime comics were available in such large numbers and in so many places.

The debates on the Fulton bill were extensive. Among the speakers were judges, members of school boards and others who evidently had gone carefully into the subject. Mr. Hansell, from Macleod, held up one comic book: "On the cover is the word 'CRIME' in large letters. I think, Mr. Speaker, you can read that from where you are sitting; but I will bet a million dollars that you cannot read the type underneath which says 'does not pay.' It is so small it is almost negligible."

He gave statistics of the contents of one book:

punch or bludgeoning with a blackjack or something else	11 times
burning or torturing	8 times
blood running	2 times
guns depicted	14 times
corpses depicted	4 times
drinking bouts	5 times
somebody in the electric chair	2 times
poisoning	3 times
gassing	1 time

"I ask any reasonably minded man," he went on, "is that the sort of thing our young people should be reading? The publishers circumvent the law by using the words 'does not pay.' You see, we all know that is only a way of getting around the law."

Mr. Browne (St. Johns West) spoke of his experience as a judge interested in juvenile delinquency: young people are "prone to fall victims to the temptations which come to them through reading literature of that sort." He cited cases.

Mr. Cavers (Lincoln) spoke of the influence of comic books on gangs: "I am told young people buy these comics, and then form voluntary circulating libraries, passing them from one to another, so no matter what supervision there may be in the home, it is difficult to stop such a practice."

Mr. Goode (Burnaby-Richmond) characterized crime comic

books as the "offal of the magazine trade" and described one as "the most filthy book that I have ever seen on a magazine stand." He was referring to an ordinary comic book, like millions on the stands in the United States right now.

Mr. Rodney Adamson (York West) took issue with the familiar argument that delinquency is often caused by family and home conditions and that "then the crime comic book got in and did its work." "That," he said, "reinforces the argument of my friend the honorable member for Kamloops [Mr. Fulton]."

Mr. Low (Peace River): "The best teaching in the world in the home, the wisest guidance in the home, cannot always protect youngsters when they are subjected to such alluring things every time they go to a store. Any time a child goes in to buy an ice-cream cone or an all-day sucker he is faced with the alternative of these very compelling pictures and colors, and very often a lot of good salesmanship in displaying them."

Mr. Drew: "We know as a matter of actual experience that if these books are available, they will be read, and if they are read, they have a certain influence. Only two weeks ago, a mere boy of sixteen was sentenced in one of our courts to be hanged, and the evidence demonstrated clearly that his mind had been influenced by books of this kind." He called crime comics "an extremely harmful poison to the minds of our young people."

The Minister of Justice, the Hon. Stuart S. Garson, summed up the debates: "When publishers and disseminators of various kinds of crime comics and obscene literature are heartened and emboldened by this concern of ours for the preservation of literary and artistic freedom, and become steadily more impudent in their degradation of that freedom so that they transform freedom into license, the time comes, and I think we all agree that it has come, when we must take further action to curtail their offences."

No debate on such a high ethical plane, with proper regard for civil liberties but with equal regard for the rights and happi-

ness of children, has ever taken place in the United States. Was the widening periphery of my investigation into the effects of comic books leading me to the problem of where and why the democratic process is being corrupted here, to the detriment of the most defenseless members of society, the children?

The Fulton bill to outlaw crime comic books by an amendment to the criminal code was passed unanimously by the House of Commons. Then it had to come before the Canadian Senate. The Senate referred the bill to one of its standing committees. At the committee hearing, two representatives of the comic-book trade gave evidence. They were eloquent and made their usual persuasive arguments. They said that far from having an adverse influence, crime comic books are highly moral and have a very good influence on children. They almost swayed the committee.

But they made one error. They handed around some free samples of comic books. Some of the Senators had been inclined to listen to the plausible arguments. But after taking a good look at the samples selected by the industry itself to show its worth, they were aghast. The Senate passed the Fulton bill by the overwhelming majority of 91 to 5.

After the Fulton bill became law, a committee representing publishers, distributors and printers decided that comic books affected by the definition of the new law should be discontinued. Twenty-five crime comics, every one of which had figured in my Lafargue and Queens Mental Hygiene Clinic investigations, disappeared from the Canadian newsstands. Canadian parents lost nothing in the way of freedom of speech. Their children were protected from one of the influences which had made it harder for them to grow up decently. Said Mr. Fulton: "The new law imposes an obligation of self-censorship on the publisher and makes certain that what he publishes is not harmful, and this is a perfectly fair duty to impose upon those who derive profit from literature for children."

This pioneer legal experiment in the protection of childhood has been played down as far as American public-information goes. Spokesmen for the industry have proclaimed that it does not mean anything, that the law came about only because my writings had stirred up Canadian parents. There is little merit in that flattering argument. The resistance against American crime comics is going on all over the world. It is a fair statement to make that most civilized nations feel threatened by them in their most holy possessions, their children. One of the worst crime comics boasts: "Distributed in over 25 countries throughout the world!"—while a picture on the opposite page shows a U.S. Federal Agent knocking a man down with a rifle butt to the words: "Boy, that's the sweetest sound on earth."

While the American taxpayer is paying a lot of money for propaganda, including the Voice of America, and information libraries abroad, parents in most civilized nations have seen comic books right in their own towns and villages. It has gone so far that people all over the world believe that American civilization means airstrips and comic strips. Comic books are our ill-will ambassadors abroad. Whatever differences there are between the Eastern and Western countries of Europe, they are united in their condemnation of American crime comic books.

What are these nations doing about it? In Sweden, American crime comic books cannot be imported any more. On the other hand, it is reported that American-type comic books "are circulating in alarming numbers" and that there is "a campaign against them." In Holland also American crime comic books cannot be imported. Some comic books are published in Holland, but there is a wide revulsion and agitation against them. There have been articles severely criticizing them, and I have received letters from writers and others who have studied the subject: "Comic books in our country are responsible for an increase in juvenile criminality by inducing boys to play rather funny games of beating, throwing and maltreating each other,

kidnapping girls with more or less sexual intentions and stealing money to buy comic books.”

In England importation of American comic books is restricted. Many are published in England from plates or blocks fabricated in this country. They are often called “Yank magazines.” From articles published in England, from correspondence, from American travelers to England and British travelers here, I have learned that very many people who have directly to do with children are greatly worried about them. “The volume of public protests is growing,” writes one of my British correspondents.

People are more concerned about the subtle distortion of children’s minds than by cases of violent forms of delinquency and murder, although there were enough of those comic-book delinquencies, too. One of these was seriously commented upon and featured in headlines as “The Boy Who Thought *Crime Could Pay*.” This teen-ager burglarized jewel shops and pubs, tried to stab a policeman and finally shot one. Those who knew him best, his father, mother and some neighbors, described as his outstanding characteristic his reading of comic books. “Always reading that Yank stuff with gangsters and gun molls,” said his father. A neighbor described how the boy had lent him crime comic books and how he had taken from them the role of a gangster: “He looked like a gangster. He talked on the side of his mouth like a gangster.” He used comic book vocabulary: “They’re not goin’ to get me alive. I’ll get as many of them as I can before they get me.” Or (about work): “This is too hard a way to earn dough.” His mother told pathetically how he was always quiet and read these crime comic books: “I thought there was no harm.” He collected knives and guns and air pistols such as are advertised in comic books. When finally cornered, he would not surrender and was shot in a battle with the police. A Sten gun and a crime comic book lay beside his body.

British children have also been playing the type of game directly taken out of comic books. One little boy, for instance, was

tied to a tree and left to roast beside a bonfire, a typical comic-book performance.

The current agitation in England against American and American-style comics is toned down a little because there are interests which spread the idea in Great Britain that to be against comic books shows anti-American sentiment. It is certainly an important fact that among wide sections of the population of the British Commonwealth crime comics can be identified with American civilization. In my correspondence with British people I have done my best to explain that in my opinion American mothers are just as anxious to free their children from the stifling encroachment of comic books as are the mothers of any other nation.

Many British organizations devoted to child welfare have come out strongly against comic books and asked that the government do something about them. The National Federation of Women's Institutes says of the effects of comic books on "young growing minds": "[They] terrify, stimulate morbid excitement and encourage racial prejudice and glorification of violence, brutal and criminal behaviour."

The Glasgow Association of the Educational Institute of Scotland asked for a government ban: "An unhealthy and distorted view of life is presented in these comic books. Crime and law-breaking are considered as the normal state of affairs." The Association condemns the Superman type of comic books with their implication of the extermination of inferior races and points out that power and riches are described as "the most desirable things in life," while honesty and hard work find no place.

The National Union of Teachers called American comic books "lurid, debasing, sadistic and immoral" and asked that the government ban their import and printing in Britain. A resolution by schoolteachers asked the executive committee of the Association of Assistant Mistresses in Secondary Schools to take steps against United States comic books. The resolution

speaks of "these pernicious and degrading publications" which are "calculated to have damaging effect upon young people, both morally and culturally."

The issue of comic books was also raised in the British House of Commons several times. In answer to a question about the harm comic books do to children, a government representative said that he would certainly consult the Home Secretary and the Minister of Education on the subject. On another occasion the member for Coventry displayed comic books and read from them and said that the most sinister thing about these publications was that they introduce an element of pleasure into violence and encourage sadism in connection with unhealthy sexual stimulation. He pointed out that magistrates have found that certain juvenile delinquents who engaged in violent acts used this type of so-called comics as their favorite reading matter. He added: "One of the most alarming facts of this particular situation is the tremendous amount of profit which exists in their sale . . ." and demanded: "Children should be protected from the insidious and pernicious effect of this type of reading." A headmaster and member agreed and added that such brutalizing and degrading reading matter was probably not unconnected with the 28,000 crimes committed by children under fourteen. Another member stated: "[Comic book reading is] causing a great deal of anxiety among the parents of this country and many of them just do not know what action to take." She felt that the Government should "take active steps to stop the poisoning of the minds of our children and of our adolescents."

Following this debate (and on other occasions) letters against comic books were published in newspapers. A typical one to the *London Times* says: "This [better education] is being jeopardized by those comics which are of a particularly vicious kind with the nastiest sort of appeal to the changing instincts of adolescents . . . the onus is on officialdom to show at least that these comics are not a contributing factor [to juvenile

crime]. Since these publications are universally recognized as pernicious what objection can there be to their prohibition? . . . It is, I know, a matter of grave concern to many headmasters in areas where these comics are being distributed and local education authorities are of course helpless in the matter. In an age of uncertain values and deficient faith the least that society can do is to extirpate obvious evils." (Neville Sandelson, Lincoln's Inn.)

During another debate on comic books in the House of Commons a woman physician and member said it was quite impossible for parents to exercise control over the reading matter of adolescents and asked the Home Secretary to look into it again.

In 1953 in the House of Commons immediately after prayers a member presented a petition signed by thousands of people. It asked Parliament to take steps to ban the production, import and distribution of American and American-style comic books. It said that the "so-called comics which have as their theme horror, crime, violence and sex, which are exposed for sale or for view throughout the country" are "dangerous and unsuitable for children."

The Hampstead Borough Council of London debated a proposal to ask the London County Council to look into the effects of comic books on the minds of children. The National Association of School Masters carried a resolution, by an overwhelming majority, against the published and imported comic books as "a menace to the mental health of youth": "What we are against is that type of children's book in which there are constant references to people being beaten up, in which cruelty is looked upon as strength and terror is regarded as an every-day emotion."

At a conference of educational associations at King's College, the Warden of Bembridge School, Isle of Wight, showed some typical comic books "illustrated with half-naked women" and the text in "balloons with handles." He said: "None of these is worthy of a place higher than the gutter. Their contents are

contemptible. I do not know how to express my indignation at the fact that this stuff should be allowed to come into this country.”

At the annual conference of the British Federation of Psychologists at Bournemouth, a resolution was passed favoring restrictive legislation against comic books which “glorify crime, brutality and lust.” At a meeting of teachers and mothers in London, American comic books were taken up and it was pointed out that “most of the comics our children read are brutal and sadistic. Ninety-nine out of a hundred covers particularly are sexy and show scenes of violence.”

A new society, the Company of New Elizabethans, has been founded by Miss Noel Streatfeild, author of many books for girls, to combat the “vicious, degrading contents of modern so-called comics.” She believes that too many parents are unaware of the real character of comics, which show acts of cruelty and sadism in revolting detail. The Plumcroft Parent-Teacher Association expressed itself as “extremely alarmed at the increased number of these comics in circulation.”

The chairman of the Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals put some of the blame for increase of cruelty by children on American comic books: “We do not want to prosecute children, but certainly cases during the last year were so bad we had no alternative but to bring them before the juvenile courts.” The Association of Optical Practitioners issued a report on the bad effects of comics on children’s vision. And so on and on.

France has been swamped with comic books imported or published there, with French legends, from American sources. It took some time for the public to realize what was happening. Then a resistance movement set in on the part of writers, teachers, child psychologists and experts on juvenile delinquency. Helene Scheu-Riesz, a pioneer in good children’s literature, wrote about the first Treasure Chest sent by children of the United States to the children of France: “It contained so many

comics that the French teachers, in dismay, begged us to desist from sending such books, for French children began to picture America as a country of gangsters and robbers where shooting, killing and torturing were everyday occurrences." Newspapers printed illustrations from crime comic books showing deeply décolleté girls hanged in a setting of lascivious sadism and other brutalities. "With such methods," wrote one paper, "hardly different from those used by the Nazi regime, were S.S. men made."

Dr. Henri Wallon, leading French child psychologist, enumerated "the sad characteristics" of the comics: "the false science which is used only for murder, sexuality linked to cruelty, the pin-up girl with the knife [*la pin-up au couteau*], bestiality, race hatred, libidinous and perverse monsters, the Fascist notion of the superman, solitary avenger." Evidently the French doctors cannot understand that some of our child experts *recommend* all this for children.

A series of instances of juvenile delinquency "where children had aped episodes and techniques of violence shown in comic books" helped to crystallize public opinion. The government appointed a commission to protect children against harmful publications. The law was clearly aimed at American and American-style crime comic books. The commission includes two juvenile-court judges, representatives of the ministries of education, public health and justice, delegates of authors, illustrators and youth organizations. (What! no crime-comic-book publishers?) According to the new law, unanimously accepted by the National Assembly, this commission is to supervise comic books sold to children and adolescents. It provides penalties up to one year in prison and 500,000 francs fine. The commission forthwith instructed twenty-five concerns to modify their children's comic-book publications and to stop the sale of the issues then current. According to this law, publishers who intend to bring out publications for children or adolescents must submit the titles *and* lists of their directors—before publication.

It is interesting that in a bill so near to censorship (although of course it deals only with the protection of children) the extreme Right, the extreme Left and the Middle found themselves in complete agreement.

Here are some indications of what is happening in other countries. In Italy, as reported by Barrett McGurn, American comic books with Italian legends have made great inroads on children. Such words as *Crash*, *Bang* or *Zip* have become a part of their vocabulary. The newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* called the children's comic books "sensational, frightening and encouraging to instincts of violence and sensuality." A survey was conducted among 6,219 grammar school boys and girls. Twenty-six per cent liked comics "in which violence abounds and women appear largely as gun molls and never as normal housewives." Twenty-eight per cent preferred as comics characters "bandits, gangsters, outlaws, millionaires or movie stars." One Italian child commented, "I'd like to be a bandit because they win all the time and then fight until they are killed."

In the Italian Parliament American crime comic books were vehemently denounced in a debate that lasted almost a week. The speakers agreed that American comics familiarize children with violence. Nobody got up to suggest that it was the children who were violent first. They also agreed on the need of defending Italian children against the American comics which "promote violent instincts . . . or foment sentiments of hatred among citizens, people or races."

In Belgium, educators and psychologists are also attempting to stem the tide of comic books. As one school principal said, "We have started to fight to protect our pupils." The reaction in Switzerland is similar, and American bubble-gum pictures—which are just like crime-comics drawings—have been banned as too "bloodthirsty." In Portugal, American crime comic books abounded, until they were banned by a law which forbids them as "exploiting crime, terror and monstrous and licentious subjects."

It is remarkable when one reads the professional and lay literature about child welfare, how many people abroad speak of "the invasion by American comics." In the face of all this, the comic-book publishers reacted just like comic-book publishers. They did everything as before.

According to the published reports, "officials of the United States military government are boiling mad at the insistence of Economic Cooperation Administration officials on bringing American comic books to Western Germany." One official said, "If E.C.A. wants to waste its money on such tripe that is its business, but the taxpayers are certainly being milked." "This is exactly the sort of material we've been screening out of the books," said another. According to Edward R. Murrow, one comic-book publisher (who publishes some of the worst comics) had asked for guaranteed convertibility of currency for a shipment of "10,000 assorted comic books a month." W. Averell Harriman, then chief E.C.A. official in Europe, said that a proposal to use Marshall Plan funds to guarantee sales of comic books was ridiculous and would not be approved by his office. At that time Francis J. Bassett wrote to the *New York Times*: "Making available American crime comic books to Germans with E.C.A. funds does not seem the soundest way to demonstrate the advantages of our democratic society. . . . They present the worst and most distorted aspect of American life. . . . We casually send along publications that highlight murder, sensuality, crime and superman. Have the Germans not had enough of supermen?" In line with this, the director-general of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Dr. Bodet, former Mexican Foreign Minister, criticized the Superman type of crime comic book as giving children "false ideas."

In all East European countries, including Russia and Eastern Germany, crime comic books cannot be displayed or sold. West Germany was the recipient of large quantities of American crime comic books. Thoughtful Germans who did not need de-

Nazification and were afraid of re-Nazification tried to stop them. In several places large numbers were held up. In Stuttgart, for example, officials of the Red Cross, which had received 20,000 comic books, were afraid that they would "teach violence to the German children." The dilemma of Europeans who would like to believe in true democracy and then encounter it in questionable forms is well symbolized by this episode. The officials did not know what to do. They felt that they could not give the books to the children, they did not want to burn them on account of old associations and they could not send them back. There were also protests in Austria. One magazine had an article against American comic books under the title "Caution Poison!"

In Mexico, writers, parents and teachers have made a large-scale attempt to have the government stop the importation of American crime comics. Here as in other countries this has had a bad effect on importation of other magazines from the United States, the legitimate defense against crime comic books spreading to other publications. Here, too, apologists for comic books have attempted to sell the old story that they are good for reading, with much-resented slurs on the literacy of the Mexican population. At the end of 1953 the sale of American comic books which sow race hatred against Asiatic people was forbidden by law in Mexico. In Australia newspaper articles criticizing comic books have appeared with typical comic-book illustrations. The Australian Journalists Association has asked for a ban on the importation of American comics. In the Union of South Africa their importation has also been prohibited. The law there specifically includes old issues. Voices against comic books have also been raised in Brazil and Egypt, in Indonesia, in India and in South American countries. It is a chorus of dismay.

Newspapers in the United States have reflected very little of this widespread concern abroad and of the many attempts of parents there to protect their children from American and

American-style comic books. Lincoln Steffens has shown how newspapers can create a crime wave. I have found that they can make ruffled waters appear calm, too. The more I followed the reactions abroad, the more I realized that, like the export of narcotics, crime comic books have become an international problem.

XII

The Devil's Allies

The Struggle Against the Comic-Book Industry

"Neutral men are the devil's allies."

—E. H. Chapin

Suppose a child comes to me with a gastro-intestinal disorder. I examine him carefully and come to the conclusion that the cause of the trouble is an impure well. I give some medication for the child and tell him not to drink that water any more. A little while later another child comes to me with the same condition, and after that still another. In each case my clinical judgment traces the trouble to the same well. What under such circumstances is the doctor's job? Should I wait until more and more children from this neighborhood come to me? Should I listen to those who say that after all there are children who have drunk water from this well and not got sick? Or to those who say it is good for children to get sick to the stomach occasionally, to "adjust them to reality"? Or should I listen to the owners of the well who claim first that children do not drink from their well, secondly that the well water is good for them and thirdly that interfering with the owners' right to use the well in any way they please is against their constitutional liberties?

I should certainly not be influenced by the child's opinion that he likes this well, nor by the assertions of those in the pay of the well-owners who claim that this particular well satisfies a "need" in children. It seems to me that my duty as a doctor is to make sure in the first place that these children *have* been drinking from this well. And then to be guided by an expert determination whether this well is sufficiently contaminated to have caused the trouble.

That is exactly what I did with comic books.

My conclusion as to the harmfulness of crime comic books got an ever larger foundation as my case material increased over the years. In the Lafargue Clinic, in the psychiatric service and the mental hygiene clinic of Queens General Hospital, in the Quaker Emergency Service Readjustment Center, in practice and in consultation, some five hundred children a year came to my attention. In the clinics I built upon intimate relationship with the community so that I had frequent contact

with practically every public and private agency in New York that deals with mental-hygiene problems of children and young people. My associates and I gained a survey of children of all classes and dealt both practically and scientifically with all factors known to influence children adversely, from physical to mental.

At the beginning of our comic-book studies, crime comic books were not recognized as a pathogenic factor. As we went along we had the advantage that we could study them in the setting of an all-inclusive mental-hygiene approach and in their interaction with all other psychological and environmental factors. Comic books transcend all class lines, all intelligence levels, all differences in home conditions. But there is no doubt that the long-range harm is greater and more insidious in all those children less well-endowed materially, intellectually, educationally and socially. The much-abused concept of the predisposed child is misleading in any such study. It is far more scientific to use the concept we worked out at Lafargue, of the *endangered* child.

I have testified six times under oath on the harmfulness of comic books. On only three of these occasions were comic books the original issue. On all six occasions comic books and/or photostats of comic-book pictures were received and filed as evidence by the court or the legislators. In all but one case (in which I testified in affidavit form), I was subject to searching cross-examination. In all six cases the issue was decided in accordance with my testimony, and for the side for which I testified. This sounds very optimistic, but that is not how it turned out in the long run.

At a Post Office hearing in Washington I had to give a psychiatric analysis of what constitutes obscenity. By way of comparison with nudity in art and photography, I introduced comic books which I called obscene. I pointed out that the picture of a nude girl *per se* may be the opposite of obscene, as compared to one of a girl in brassiere and panties about to be tied up,

gagged, tortured, set on fire, sold as a slave, chained, whipped, choked, raped, thrown to wild animals or crocodiles, forced to her knees, strangled, torn apart and so on.

The people present evidently had not looked much at comic books, though they were bought by their children and on sale at stands within a stone's throw of the building. I suggested that as a test I would go out to any of these stands, and most of the comic books on sale would have episodes like those I had enumerated. From those I had with me, three were picked at random and marked and received in evidence.

The hearing was conducted with great fairness. Its result: "In view of the testimony adduced at the hearing," the Post Office reversed its previous ruling according to which a magazine for adults had been barred from the mails.

It was on a similar problem that I testified about comic books next, but on this occasion I was not the one who introduced the subject. The first novel of a young writer, published by a respected firm, had been accused of being obscene according to the law. A quantity of copies of the book had been seized in a raid on the publishing house. I appeared as a witness for the defense at the trial and gave it as my opinion that the novel was not obscene and the ban should be lifted. While waiting to be called, I sat outside and analyzed the contents of comic books. When called to the stand, I thrust them hastily into my brief case.

In the course of the cross-examination the prosecuting counsel suddenly pointed his finger at my face and demanded:

"Let's get to another subject—with regard to comic books. You were the chairman of a meeting at the New York Academy of Medicine a short time ago, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"And in the course of your remarks you referred to the sexual content of comic books, Doctor?"

"Yes."

"And you condemned them thoroughly as having a demoralizing and injurious effect?"

"Yes."

"Now if one kind of book would have an effect, another book would?"

I reached into my brief case and pulled out one of the comic books and handed it, open to a typical sadistic illustration, to the judge. My cross-examiner objected to the introduction of a comic book as evidence. But, as the lawyers say, he himself had opened the door for it, by bringing up the subject. I used the opportunity to defend the character of the novel in comparison with comic books and made three points.

In the first place, the novel is for adults, while this type of comic book (according to my studies and as shown by the advertisements) is read mostly by children.

Secondly, the accused passages in the novel had to do with normal erotic relationships while comic books glorify such perversions as sadism, and all kinds of violence in relation to sex.

Thirdly, this novel belongs to the realm of literature and art and reaches a relatively small number of readers, while these comic books are mass produced and just trash.

The judge had been looking at the comic book, first with disbelief and then with dismay.

"Who says these comic books are good?" he asked me.

"The defenders of the comic-book industry," was my answer.

A few weeks later he handed down his decision, freeing the novel and dismissing the complaint against it.

Following a meeting of the Association for the Advancement of Psychotherapy at which some of my associates and I presented scientific results of our study—the content analysis of comic books, the varieties of harm they do to children, case examples and the theoretical principles involved—the question of a remedy came more and more into the foreground. I have little patience with those who, when they hear of something wrong, immediately and without knowing the details ask, What

should be done? First one should *know*. Pathology comes before therapeutics.

My writing and speaking had had at least one effect: parents began to look at comic books. I received letters and inquiries from all over the country. Many had the refrain expressed by one mother: "We who care about such things feel so helpless."

That crystallized for us a wider problem of comic books. It was no longer merely a question of what they do to children but what they were doing to the relationship between children and parents. Why in a democracy should parents feel "helpless?" Parents, I knew from many instances, had made all kinds of attempts to shield their children from comic books. Some had forbidden them. That did not prove to be a good method because it led children to the ubiquitous temptation to get or read them anyhow. Believe it or not, children do not like to lie. But we tempt them and almost force them to. That was very apparent from our studies. In the beginning children were all too eager to tell us all about the crime comic books they had read. They were proud to tell us all they knew about the crocs (crocodiles) and crooks, the stranglers and the supermen, the machine guns and gun molls. But as knowledge and therefore condemnation of comic books spread, children knew more clearly what they had only unconsciously sensed before, that reading crime comic books was a half-forbidden pleasure. So they lied to their parents and became evasive with the many questioners who suddenly sprang up all over the country in the false belief that you can find out about a child by springing a lot of questions on him. Now, when questioned about comic books, children are apt to tell you how they read about floppy rabbits and Bugs Bunny and Donald Duck. But when their parents leave the room, or when you gain their confidence, they will take you wide-eyed into the "walls of horrors," "chambers of misery" or "ambushes for massacres."

Some parents went over their children's belongings and confiscated or destroyed hundreds of books at a time. That did not

help either. Or they tried earnestly the advice handed out by numerous amateurish child experts: Why don't you read the comic books first and select the good ones? Many children read so many comic books that a housewife could get little else done if she tried that. Besides, who was going to tell her that if Batman were in the State Department he would be dismissed, and that Superman does not belong in the nursery? Can we put on mothers the burden of determining how many murders a child should have a week, or the job of evaluating in each new comic book the ethics of the jungle?

Not that there are no children who are influenced in the right direction by thoughtful parents with enough time to spend. The four-year-old son of one of my associates was taken to an infectious disease hospital with scarlet fever. There the nurses, to make him feel at home, gave him some comic books. But he earnestly refused them, explaining to the startled nurses that his father had said they are not good for children.

There was of course the possible remedy that the publishers would clear up the well. But I soon found that this was a naive belief. The very comic books that contained the ingredients that we found harmful were the most widely read. The publishers knew what they were doing and why. They had employed experts who justified the situation and fought off criticism.

So one day when I was in the country and saw how this locust plague had settled on a group of nice children whom I knew well, the idea came to me that the only honest and effective remedy would be a law or an ordinance against crime comic books.

I had been invited to speak about comic books at the 1948 Annual Congress of Correction of the American Prison Association in Boston, at a joint meeting of the National Conference of Juvenile Agencies and the National Probation and Parole Association. So I presented there an analysis of comic books and of clinical cases. I pointed out how harmful comic books were to the healthy development of normal children and how in some

they produced anxiety and in others an obtuseness toward human feeling and suffering. Where one child commits a delinquent act, many are stimulated to undesirable and harmful thinking and fantasies. Some of the worst, I said, are marked "Approved Reading," "Wholesome Entertainment" and the like. The net effect of comic books, I stated, is anti-social: "Children who spend a lot of time and money on comic books have nothing to show for it afterwards. Many of them have gotten into trouble of one kind or another. The crimes they have read about in comic books are real; the people who supposedly triumph in the end are often very unreal superman types. How many more cases like the eleven-year-old comic-book addict who killed a forty-two-year-old woman in a holdup do we need before we act? The pure food and drug law, the ordinances against spitting in the subway and about clean drinking-cups protect bodies. Surely the minds of children deserve as much protection. I do not advocate censorship, which is imposing the will of the few on the many, but just the opposite, a step to real democracy: the protection of the many against the few. That can only be done by law. Just as we have ordinances against the pollution of water, so now we need ordinances against the pollution of children's minds." I suggested a law that would forbid the display and sale of crime comic books to children under fifteen.

The response to my proposal was widespread. Dozens of towns and cities—eventually over a hundred—passed ordinances against the very comic books whose harmfulness I had indicated. In a number of states anti-comic-book laws were introduced in legislatures, but the comics conquered the committees, and the laws did not come off.

The most serious and efficient attempt to pass a county law was made in Los Angeles County in California. The County Counsel, Harold W. Kennedy, read about the proposal I had made in Boston about a law and framed one according to which the sale of comic books in which crime and violence were prom-

inently featured could not be sold to anyone under eighteen. The Board of Supervisors passed this law. Then it was of course contested by the comic-book industry. Mr. Kennedy asked me to give detailed testimony for use in the courts, which I did in the form of a lengthy affidavit.

In it I described the clinical results of our studies showing how crime comic books have had a bad effect on the mind and personality development of children—including normal children.

I gave detailed examples of cases and of comic books, and described the absence of regulation in the sale of crime comics to children as a state of anarchy which could be remedied only by a law. My affidavit was accompanied by twenty-nine exhibits, photographs and photostats of comic books sold to children.

The law won a great deal of acclaim in and beyond Los Angeles County. One large chain drugstore which sold many comic books, on the day after the ordinance was adopted, and with full knowledge that it would not be effective for thirty days, voluntarily removed from its shelves all the comic books in question.

Mr. Kennedy was no novice in devising such a law. In twenty-two years he had personally participated in the framing of no less than 389 bills that have become part of the statutory laws of California. It seemed to me significant that the 389th law was the Air Pollution Control or Anti-Smog Act, a good preparation for working on a comic-book law. "After all," he stated, "we don't feel that it is the true sense of the law that these publishers have the right to pollute the minds of young people under the guise of funny books and adventures and crime stories."

The subsequent legal history of this law was most involved, with the real issue of its clinical justification not taken up at all. The newspapers reported briefly that the law had been declared unconstitutional. The spokesmen for the comic-book industry have repeated this so often that many people, including

lawyers and legislators, really believe that such a law was declared unconstitutional in California and would be unconstitutional anywhere else. But that is not how it was.

The comic-book interests (from New York) challenged the law through local attorneys as violating the freedom of the press. It was first a civil suit. In that phase the Appellate Department of the Superior Court, sitting as a trial court, denied a preliminary injunction sought by the distributors. The reason for the request of the injunction was the constitutionality of the law, so this court in denying the injunction did not consider the law unconstitutional. Then through two arrests for violation of the county ordinance, the stage was shifted to a criminal court. The two defendants were represented by the same firm which brought the civil suit. They were guided by the New York lawyers and needed their approval for every step. The question of whether crime comic books were bad for children was never allowed to come up. The final ruling of the Appellate Department of the Superior Court, consisting of three judges, was against the ordinance. But the reasons for their decision are interesting:

JUDGE NO. 1: The wording of the ordinance is too vague for the federal constitution, but it does not conflict with freedom of the press as guaranteed under the state constitution.

JUDGE NO. 2: The wording is not vague at all. But it deprives the publishers of their freedom of the press.

JUDGE NO. 3: The law is not too vague and does not deprive them of the freedom of the press.

Analyzed, what does this mean? On each of the two questions, namely whether the law was too vague and whether it was against the freedom of the press, the judges had given a favorable vote of 2 to 1 for the law. Yet the case as a whole was lost and the law could not stand. More important still, the appeal on behalf of the people to the Supreme Court of the United

States in Washington which Mr. Kennedy had planned was prevented by a further technicality: Since no two judges thought that the ordinance violated any guarantee under the federal constitution, no such appeal could be made!

To somebody not versed in the law all this seems absurd. The publishers of course were jubilant. They had worked hard to get such a result. They won. The children lost.

Despite the fact of these adverse court decisions and despite the fact that twenty-seven comic-book bills all over the country were killed in committee, the public—or rather, mothers—continued sporadic protests. The comic-book industry answered with a magic word, a “code.”

About a month after my views were summarized in a national magazine a new code was announced. Let us decode these codes. They are not spontaneous expressions of self-improvement or self-regulation. They are determined efforts at defense. They do not stand alone, but are part of an avalanche of arguments thrust successfully at the public by the comic-book industry. The arguments go like this. First, any specific criticism of comic books is “not true.” If proved true, it is only an exception, it slipped in and the man who drew the picture “has just been fired.” Moreover, comic books are for adults, and besides they are very good for children. And then there is a code. If it is shown that the code is not adhered to, it is because they have not had time to put the code into practice; that will take another “three months.” If after these three months the criticism is repeated, there will be announced a new code which is even better.

Comic books may be a little subject, but they have given me an insight into one of the more terrifying aspects of our social and political life. I have learned from studying what happens with them how easy it is to propagandize a whole nation against its most treasured interests, its children. Editorial writers all over the country accepted the codes at their face value! Everybody thought something had been achieved.

What do the codes all add up to? The one announced in direct response to my criticism said that sexiness, "glorification of crime," "sadistic torture" and "race ridicule" would henceforth be left out. In other words, this is no longer just what *I* say. This is what the *industry* itself concedes. Why has all this gone on for over ten years? They indicted themselves by saying that *now* they would stop.

Here again the cynicism of the publishers breaks through. When I pointed out that a comic book had on its inside cover a code according to which blood was not to be shown any more, and yet one page later shows a close-up with blood streaming from a man's face, the publisher announced that he had not had time yet to put the code into practice. Suppose a candy factory sells lollypops and one batch of lollypops is bad. A respectable firm would immediately recall all those lollypops that had been distributed. And the lollypop factory would not get away with getting out a code saying, "No poisonous lollypops will be sold by this firm in the future,"—meanwhile letting the children vomit over the bad ones "until the code is in operation." (Incidentally, I have seen children vomit over comic books.) I looked for the following number of this comic book, after the one that had the code on the inside cover. Did they leave out the blood? No, that was shown again in four consecutive pictures. *They left out the code.*

But what about the "good" comic books? Whenever the industry is challenged by parents, teachers or mothers' clubs, it forgets all about the "good" comic books and relies on legal technicalities to ward off any attempt to regulate or force it into self-regulation. That happened in Chicago, in Detroit, in Los Angeles County and in New York. But "good" comic books are important because in some naive way many parents think that the "good" comic books are the answer to any problem that presents itself. So critics of the industry should look into the question of what they are, and how many there are of them, even though this is a question the industry itself always shuns.

Among the "good" comic books whose quantity counts at all are usually reckoned the animal comics, the Disney comics and their imitators, classical books in comic-book form, comic books that are reprints of newspaper comic strips, some teen-age girl comics and some boys' sport comics. The mainstay of the "good" comic books are the animal comics and a few of the relatively innocuous related comics.

It is estimated that at the present time (1954) the number of comic books fluctuates around 90 million a month. There are estimates which are lower; there are others of 100 million a month and more. According to *The Wall Street Journal* (1953) there were 840,000,000 units a year, 20 per cent more than four years earlier.

Precise figures, which of course would have to be based on records of printing orders, are not available. One has to estimate carefully from all available data the numbers printed, published, distributed and actually read. One has to take into account that crime comic books are traded so often and for so many years and are handed around to so many people and read so repeatedly. One must consider also that some crime comics have larger editions of each title than the "good" ones, and have more issues per year. On this basis I have concluded that the animal and related comics containing no harmful ingredients amount at the most to no more than between one and two tenths of the whole. That is what all the fuss about "good" comics boils down to.

The much-vaunted animal comics are read only by the very young, and are bought mostly by parents. They are showpieces prominently displayed where parents or teachers are apt to be shopping or passing by. *They are the only ones occasionally read aloud by parents.* If a child tries to trade rabbit stuff with other children, he is jeered at because the only comics traded are killer ones.

Frequently the "good" comics have bad features, too. They sometimes show cruelty. Ducks shoot atomic rays and threaten

to kill rabbits: "I'll kill the parents, I'm a hard guy and my heart is made of stone."

They have advertisements for "throwing knives," for pistols shooting steel darts and of course for crime comics. The "good" comics are the pacemakers for the bad ones.

When one looks at these "good" comic books two things strike one: The ingredients of crime comics, the violence and sadism, break through in some "good" ones, too, no doubt through the processes of contagion and competition; and one becomes aware how blunted the tastes of the public have become with regard to what is proper children's reading.

Henry, a boy of six, had frightened a little girl when he tried to scratch her leg under her dress with a piece of glass. His mother, a very intelligent woman, felt the ordinary comic books were not good for children and selected only the harmless animal ones for him. During playroom therapy the boy showed another boy one of his comic books. It was an animal one, but he grew very excited when describing the exploits in it: A little boy with his companions were fighting all kinds of animals. He had a little spear with which he poked one animal in the nose and another in the mouth. Into the face of still another he thrust a flaming torch. But the real high point was our old friend, the injury-to-the-eye motif: one character in the story directs a sharp-pointed spear at an animal's eye with the words: ". . . I'll put your eye out!"

Children have shown me a comic book which mothers must think is "good." It is produced by one of the biggest comic-book publishers, is given away free by a famous-brand food manufacturer and has the name of Hopalong Cassidy on it. It shows an "insane" barber running loose with a sharp razor. He ties an old man to the barber's chair, brandishing a razor.

The old man: "He's stopping the razor! And he's got that mad look on his face! He'll cut my throat! GULP!"

A close-up follows with the face of the old man bound to the chair, the face of the barber, the knife and the neck. The same

scene is shown a second time, and a third. Then comes Hoppy, twists the barber's arm backward and knocks him out so he sees stars: "WHAM!"

I have talked to children about this book. They do not say this book is about the West, or about Hopalong Cassidy, or about a barber. They say it is about killing and socking people and twisting their arms and cutting their throats.

Take one that looks even more harmless, *Howdy Doody*. I discussed this with a group of white and colored children. Their reaction was partly giggling, partly inhibited. The book depicts colored natives as stereotyped caricatures, violent, cowardly, cannibalistic and so superstitious that they get scared by seltzer tablets and popping corn and lie down in abject surrender on their faces before two little white boys.

The same theme of race ridicule is played up in the good animal comic book *Bugs Bunny*. Colored people are described as "superstitious natives" and you see them running away. The injury-to-the-eye motif is added, Bugs Bunny being shown throwing little diamonds into the eyes of the colored people. They are "big enough to blind a feller!" says Bunny. "Awk! I can't see!" says one victim. Is that not the same crime-comic-book ingredient adapted to the youngest set?

"Very young children," says the child psychiatrist Dr. David Levy, "have no prejudice. Their later antagonistic reactions to those who are different are regarded as the result of parental or group indoctrination." Has there ever been a greater and earlier and more insidious indoctrination with race hatred than American children are exposed to in comic books, "good" or bad?

Among other "good" comic books are those that teach history. Typical is one called *Your United States*. It devotes one page to each state and, although on bad paper and as smudgily printed as the others, it really contains some instructive information. But practically every state, although it gets only one page, has a scene of violence; if one doesn't, that is made up for in other states where there are two or three such scenes. For

instance, a man hanged from a tree by a "vigilance committee"; Negroes in chains; corpses and dying men; a girl tied to a tree, her bound wrists above her head, her skirt blowing up in the wind and a coy facial expression of fright as in a sadist's dream; a girl about to be raped or massacred. Is that what you want your children to think is the history of "Your United States"?

Here is another comic book dealing with history and education, especially sent to me as a shining example. It has a feature about the Olympic games: "The Olympic games were the greatest sporting event of the ancient world. But any ladies caught watching them were thrown over a cliff." Here I have gone all these years without knowing that! And lest the child miss the point, an illustration shows it: A well-developed girl with the same coy expression of alarm runs along a steep cliff hotly pursued by a he-man in a helmet. Another item for the child's information is that there was "fixing" in the Olympic games. One could call this the contemporary approach to ancient history.

Inaccuracies in historical comics are common. People are hanged during the French Revolution (when the gallows had been abolished), the trial of Edward Floyde, important in the fight of the Crown against Parliament, is falsified; the end of the Boer War is wrongly presented, while the story has such choice bits as "You dirty British swine!"

A good summary of comic books in which "history emerges from balloons" was given by May Lamberton Becker in the *Herald Tribune*: "I can't say I think much of any of them. If you try to meet Superman on his own ground, you will be beaten unless you jazz up history until it isn't history at all."

There are publicity comic books to influence adults. Sylvia F. Porter, the financial columnist, writes about a comic book got out by the American Bankers Association: "The aim is not just to amuse you. Not by a long shot. It is to mold your thinking in a specific way." If that is true of good comic books for

bankers, isn't it true, too, of bad comic books for children? They mold a child's thinking in a specific way.

Political comic books are the exact opposite of crime comics. In *The Story of Harry S. Truman*, for example, characters who might well be featured in a crime comic book are suppressed. Boss Pendergast is not mentioned. And instead of him, there is at the beginning of the Truman saga this domestic scene: Young Truman coming home and saying to his wife, "Bess, the boys at the Legion meeting were talking about having me run for county judge."

Those who attempt to use comic books for educational purposes forget that crime comic books have set up in children associations which counteract their efforts. An educational comic book for teen-agers on juvenile drug addiction cannot do any good to adolescents who have been stimulated by other comics about a girl's dreams "of murder and morphine."

I have never seen any good effects from comic books that condense classics. Classic books are a child's companion, often for life. Comic-book versions deprive the child of these companions. They do active harm by blocking one of the child's avenues to the finer things of life. There is a comic book which has on its cover two struggling men, one manacled with chains locked around hands and feet, the other with upraised fist and a reddened, bloody bandage around his head; onlookers: a man with a heavy iron mallet on one side and a man with a rifle and a bayonet on the other. The first eight pictures of this comic book show an evil-looking man with a big knife held like a dagger threatening a child who says: "Oh, don't cut my throat, sir!" Am I correct in classifying this as a crime comic? Or should I accept it as what it pretends to be—Dickens' *Great Expectations*?

Elizabeth V. Brattig, a high school teacher, asked children as a class assignment to read the comic-book versions of classics and then compare them with the original book. In the case of George Eliot's *Silas Marner* the children laughed "at the droll

discrepancies in the story and the incongruities in the illustrations": "Silas is represented as senile and hoary, somewhat like the Ancient Mariner throughout"; "the flavor of George Eliot, the warm human touches, the scenes of matchless humor, had been completely ignored by the *Classic Comics*."

The idea that by giving children something good to read, crime comics can be combatted, purified or eliminated has proved naive wherever it was tried. It does not take into account the mass character of the seduction, which is precisely why crime comic books are an entirely new phenomenon not equalled before at any time nor place. You cannot clear up the muddy water in a stream by planning a clear brook that flows in the opposite direction.

I had an opportunity to watch an experiment showing the hold of the crime-comic-book industry on the market and on public opinion. One day Wally, a five-year-old boy, went home to his parents in Mamaroneck with a comic book filled with half-dressed jungle queens and all kinds of sadistic exploits and cruelties. His parents, like millions of other parents, had thought he had been reading *Donald Duck* and other such animal comics. That experience gave Mr. Henry H. Stansbury the idea of combatting bad comic books with really good ones.

With eleven other fathers—having altogether forty-nine children—who had had similar experiences, he started a small publishing venture. There was to be a series of good comic books. The first, which has been called the only good comic book in existence, was the beautiful story of *The Nightingale* by Hans Christian Andersen. It is illustrated by the well-known watercolorist Dong Kingman and printed in beautiful colors. The paper is of much better quality than the usual comic book and the printing is good and clear. Although it cost ten cents *The Nightingale* was not a regular comic book because the dialogue was not in balloons. And it did not conform to the comic-book formula according to which a story is so abundantly illustrated

that the action can be followed almost without reading any of the words.

With this series Mr. Stansbury hoped to deal a blow to the onslaught of crime comics. But how to bring this about by getting the project before the public? A national magazine, the *Woman's Home Companion*, was enthusiastic about it. They had already prepared a layout for an article dealing with this new comic-book series. But at the last moment Mr. Stansbury was told by the "child care expert" of the magazine, herself a senior staff member of the Child Study Association of America, that he must first "submit" the comic books to the Consultant of Children's Reading of the Child Study Association of America, who (according to the Kefauver Committee) is in the employ of the comic-book industry. Mr. Stansbury pleaded with the editors who had liked his plan and *The Nightingale* so much. He asked why he must go to "somebody whose name appears on some of the most objectionable comic books." But that is what had to be done before they would print his article. He refused, and the *Woman's Home Companion* never printed a word about the project. That is how things are sewed up in the comic-book field. The industry won again, and the children lost. I know many other similar examples. They show how unrealistic it is to think that the flood tide of crime comics can be stemmed by trying to launch good comics. The public, of course, does not know about these connections.

The whole question of "good" comic books can be summed up in this way: Crime comic books are poisonous plants. The "good" comic books are at best weeds.

Some "bad" comic books are universally acknowledged to be bad. These are the frankly pornographic little booklets which made their first appearance during the depression and have flourished ever since. In relation to real comic books their number is of course small. They are all caricatures of newspaper comic strips. For example, there are *Burma*, *Flash Gordon*, *Blondie*, *Uncle Bim* and *Millie*, *Major Hoople*, *Popeye*, etc.

Whereas in regular comic books the publishers remain in semianonymity, in pornographic ones the anonymity is complete. I have had a number of these books brought to me by adolescents, juvenile-aid officers and others who have to do with children. They are sold widely in schools and the authorities seem to pay little attention to them. One fifteen-year-old boy explained to me:

“I got this from a friend. They usually cost anywhere from a dime to half a dollar. The small kids pay more. They have never seen anything like it; they think it’s great stuff! Guys in school sell them. You have to ask for a ‘hot book.’ There is a big traffic in it if you have time to peddle them. There are thousands of these books around. These guys sell them to certain kids and these are the kids that peddle them around. Girls buy them, too. I have shown them to a girl.”

Apparently it is generally believed, and educators have told me so, that these pornographic comic books deal with sex while ordinary comic books do not. This is a greatly mistaken opinion. Both types of books are sexy. The difference is in the kind of perversions. This division is complete. The pornographic ones contain no violence. Children’s crime comics abound in the perversions of sadism, masochism, flagellation, fetichism, and pedophilia. The little pornographic books have orogenitalism (mouth erotism), intercourse in unusual kinds of positions, including triolism (sex practices between three people), and anal erotism. Whereas in ordinary comic books virility is indicated in the advertisements and in inflated masculinity of supermen in tight uniforms, in the pornographic comic books the oversized erect penis is featured; whereas in the ordinary children’s comic books the would-be raper grabs the half-nude girl violently and says: “You have your choice—come as my prisoner or I’ll choke the life out of you!”, in the little pornographic comics everything is done voluntarily.

It is strange that educators and child psychologists regard the first set of perversions as manifestly harmless in helping the

child to get rid of his supposed aggressions, while the second set is not so condoned. Actually, my studies have shown that the first set of perversions are more injurious to fantasy-life and mental health in the long run. Violence is not a normal substitute for sex, but a morbid one. Moreover, when unscrupulous adults seduce and use children for sexual and criminal activities, they do not use these little pornographic comics, but shower the child with the ordinary crime comic books. In this way children have been softened up by adults for the numbers game, the protection racket, drug addiction, child prostitution (female and male); and girls have been softened up for crimes where they serve as decoys. A special way in which children are being used nowadays by adults is as "watchers." Adults who have sexual relations in a park engage children as young as seven to watch for policemen.

Many years ago, when the British House of Lords debated a law to abolish capital punishment for the theft of five shillings, the Lord Chief Justice remonstrated: "My Lords, if we suffer this Bill to pass we shall not know where we stand; we shall not know whether we are upon our heads or our feet. No man can trust himself an hour out of doors. . . ." This is the kind of opposition I encountered when I asked for a crime-comics law. I have been astonished by this aversion to law. Does not our whole social life exist and progress in the framework of laws? Yet again and again I have been told that legislation is the last thing I should think of in my efforts to protect children against crime comic books. For instance, the legal counsel of the Association of Comics Magazine Publishers declared: "The problem is not solved by a quick easy panacea like legislation." Is that what lawyers want us to think, that legislation is "quick," that it is "easy," that it is a "panacea"?

Other totally different groups seem to think along the same line. I was invited to speak at an annual conference of the American Civil Liberties Union. I outlined there my clinical objections to crime comic books, described the present comic-

book situation as an irresponsible anarchy and suggested legislation as a social remedy. A law that would forbid the display and sale of comic books to children under fifteen, I explained, would preserve the civil liberties of adults to buy the goriest crime comic books for their children if they wanted to. The official summary of the meeting was as follows: "The discussion of comic books brought out strong support for curbs upon the type of material directed toward adolescent minds unable to determine good from bad. The sense of the group was to oppose censorship by legislation, but to support pressure on the industry to establish standards prohibiting publication of objectionable material." But how does one bring pressure on a hundred-million-dollar business without a law? And how can children bring pressure? As I listened to all these serious-faced reformers objecting to the only effective curb of crime comic books, I thought of David Low's cartoon: "Gad, sir, reforms are all right as long as they don't change anything!"

Since the lawyers seemed so opposed to new laws, I studied the various laws that existed already pertaining in any way to comic books. And that led me to what seemed to me a startling discovery: As it stands, the law is heavily weighted against children, and in favor of adults, including of course the comic-book industry. This may appear unlikely, but is easily proved. I include in this statement existing laws that apply directly to this subject and others that apply more indirectly or whose application is more controversial, the whole judicial process with its appeals and lack of appeals, the administration of the law and even the penological aspects. Of the fact itself there can be no doubt. The law as it applies, or might apply, to crime comic books leaves the child unprotected, while it punctiliously safeguards the material interests of the adult.

Although in many children's lives comic books play a role, no adult court, no children's court, has ever made or ordered a full inquiry in a child's case. But when the publishers of the comic book *Eerie* sued the publisher of the comic book *Eerie*

Adventures for using the word *eerie* on the cover, the New York Supreme Court gave a learned and comprehensive opinion bristling with details and citations. Justice Frank arrived at the truly Solomonic verdict that both publishers could use the word; but that the second publisher must print it "reduced in size." If the psychological effects on children would receive the same meticulous concern as the financial interests of publishers, some court would have long since ordered that what has to be "reduced" is not the eerie title but the eerie contents!

It would be senseless to blame an individual or a court. Law, as Justice Benjamin Cardozo said, accepts as the pattern of its justice the morality of the community whose conduct it assumes to regulate. The defect of the law and of the community is shown up by its complete unpreparedness to deal with something entirely new like crime comic books. Through their unprecedented quantities, which dwarf all other present or past publishing figures, and through their literally endless repetition of the sex-crime-superman-horror formula, crime comic books *are* something entirely new. That is why they could grow to such an octopus before they were scientifically challenged. The law was as unprepared as the parents and the child psychiatrists.

The many attempts all over the country to curb crime comics show that the community by sound instinct has at the very least grave doubts about them. What are the laws that give this commodity legal sanction and permit it to get away with so much?

The example of the copyright laws is very instructive. They exist to safeguard the property rights of those who produce works that might be pirated without authorization. It surely is equitable that such rights be protected. But this law as it is being used in the case of comic books works entirely against the interests of children.

I began to realize that there is an important principle at work here. A good law, when applied to something new or to a new set of circumstances, can lend itself to grave abuse. The

greatest prop of the crime-comic-book industry was the silence with which it took over the children's market. When it was already established, and writers began to wish to inform the public of what was going on, the publishers forbade reproduction of drawings from comic books. That of course made it almost impossible to inform the public. Quite a number of national magazines wanted to print such illustrations, but were refused permission. This was the more misleading because the publishers' full-page advertisements in magazines contained special drawings of a very different kind, totally misleading as to what crime comic books are like.

The best example of the extent to which this abuse of the copyright law goes is presented by the *Journal of the American Judicature Society*, a learned journal read by judges, lawyers and legal scholars. This journal made comic books a topic of its discussions. It would have liked to secure an illustration or two, "but could not get any publisher to consent." It is obvious that no financial loss whatsoever was involved. The copyright law was used just to prevent a professional public from seeing what these books really contain.

Although comic books are not really magazines, and although even their defenders admit that many are objectionable, they enjoy second-class mailing privileges with the Post Office. This is under a law which applies to circumstances almost a hundred years ago (1879). Do not those who administer the law or the legislators who are supposed to bring laws up to date realize that they bestow a premium, a privilege, on those who mail objectionable material and that they make the taxpayers pay for the corruption of their own children? There are high officials in the Post Office Department in Washington who are fully aware that many comic books are harmful and who "have long deplored the fact that many of these publications enjoy the second class privilege under which they are transported in the mails at a considerable loss to the postal service."

The comic-book industry uses the second-class mailing priv-

ilege also as an alleged proof of the worth of its product. The general manager of one of the largest publishers has stated that since he has to submit every comic book in order to gain second-class mailing privileges for it, that shows that they are all right "so far as morals are concerned."

The Post Office also has laws against fraud. For example, they can interfere with a publisher who has misleading advertisements. But here, too, the comic-book industry seems to be immune. The Pure Food and Drug Act passed in 1906 seems to me to apply to the medicine advertisements in comic books for children. They have been severely criticized by a local department of health. But no health law has interfered with them and they get bolder all the time.

There are laws to control the sale and carrying of dangerous weapons such as guns and knives. One would expect that such laws would protect children. Just the opposite is the case. Children caught with guns—converted toy guns—or switchblade knives face the severest penalty, however young they may be. "Any boy," a judge said recently, "who comes before me for having a gun will be treated as a gangster. . . . When we come face to face with gangsters this court will give no consideration." But in millions of advertisements the possession and use of guns and switchblade knives is made as attractive as possible and the youngest child can buy them from these advertisers by mail. Is this not an instance where the law punishes the victim who falls for these advertisements while the instigator who advertises and sells them goes scot free?

A special case consists in the laws about B.B. air rifles. The penal law of New York makes it a punishable offense to offer and sell these "to any child under the age of 16 years." It also makes a child of sixteen and under "guilty of juvenile delinquency" if he merely possesses such a gun. Actually, official agencies have repeatedly warned against these weapons, because they have "resulted in many accidents causing loss of sight or serious eye injuries." But in this respect also the super-

man purveyors of Superman and the other crime-comic-book publishers and the experts endorsing them are immune, although these comics bristle with the most glamorous ads for these forbidden weapons.

Not long ago I saw a thirteen-year-old boy who was arrested for shooting an air gun from a window. In psychiatric examinations and psychological tests no abnormalities were found. This boy was under the Children's Court, and I have seen a number of similar boys who have been sent to reformatories for long stretches. In this case there was the usual description of the arrest in the form of a petition to the court: "N.N., detective, alleges that Joseph Smith, aged 13, is a delinquent child for the reason that he violated a law of the State of New York in that he was in possession of a dangerous weapon, to wit an air pistol, in good firing order, together with six darts and a quantity of lead pellets which may be fired from said air pistol."

In such cases I am often tempted to make a petition of my own: "F.W., psychiatrist, alleges that the publisher of the N.N. comic book and the experts endorsing the said comic book are delinquent adults for the reason that in concert with one another they violated a law of common decency in that they published and lent their names to a publication for children which advertises dangerous weapons, to wit air pistols, in good firing order together with steel darts and lead pellets which may be fired from said air gun and may get the innocent child who falls for these advertisements into terrible trouble with the Children's Court."

The Federal Government has laws restricting interstate commerce under certain circumstances injurious to the people. Could not such laws be made to include the shipment of objectionable comic books? Assistant District Attorney John E. Cone, who has investigated teen-age gangs, has stated as a result of his findings that crime comic books should be "done away with because not only do they list advertisements through which guns can easily be purchased by juveniles, but they give

a synthetic thrill which kids cannot fulfill in real life without actually committing crime." The suggestion for Federal legislation to bar interstate advertisements and sale of knives and toy weapons that can be converted was made by Domestic Relations Justice Louis Lorence. Hundreds and hundreds of such illegal weapons have been confiscated by the police in New York. "For a number of years," Judge Lorence stated, "all over the city boys have approached other students in schools and have demanded money for protection. If money is not given, beatings often ensue. In the past two months, particularly, there were many cases in my court where parents complained of this protection racket." I myself have seen more than twenty-five children who have either been victims of such threats or have played the racket game themselves, usually with switchblade knives. Although switchblade knives serve no purpose except quick violence, they are still advertised in comic books for the youngest children.

There are laws according to which it is a punishable offense to "contribute to the delinquency of a minor." Yet the text, pictures and advertisements in crime comic books do that constantly. A 1936 amendment to the New York City Domestic Relations Court Act says: "Such court shall also have jurisdiction, whenever the issues involving a delinquent child are before the court, summarily to try, hear and determine any charge or offense less than the grade of a felony against any person alleged to have contributed to such child's delinquency and may impose the punishment provided by law for such offense."

The New York State constitution confers on the Domestic Relations Court jurisdiction "for the punishment and correction of adults responsible for contributing to such delinquency . . . such courts may hear and determine such cases with or without a jury, except those involving a felony."

Similar laws against contributing to the delinquency of a minor exist in other states. But although children have so often

been softened up for juvenile delinquency and although there are cases where it can be demonstrated that the delinquent child bought his first switchblade knife through comic-book advertisements, and learned from comic-book text how to use it, no district attorney, no judge, no complainant, has ever had the courage to make a complaint against a comic-book publisher. Thus comic books make cowards of us all.

There are also the "attractive nuisance" laws which have been on the books since 1873 and which have been upheld by the United States Supreme Court. If you have an attractive pool to which a child has access from the street, you can be held responsible if a child drowns in it. They may not apply directly to comic books, but they provide an interesting analogy. Parents of children who get into trouble from too much crime-comic-book reading and with .22-calibre guns or switchblade knives purchased through comic-book advertisements could at least try to hold the publishers responsible.

Trial by jury and legal counsel are a right of adults. Children are being sent away to reformatories undefended and sometimes without even having their guilt properly established. I know of cases of children sent to reformatories when I was convinced that they were not guilty. In some cases familiar to me the police, needing a solution, have obtained confessions from innocent children by tricky and unfair methods. They include serious crimes, even homicide. In the procedure in the Children's Court we find again the principle that good laws and procedures may turn into their opposites. Children's courts were a great step forward; but nowadays they have to deal with such serious delinquencies that it would be more in the interests of children if the procedure were less informal—and a little less routine. The safeguards for children in court have turned into a danger for them. The secrecy in children's courts, in itself commendable, has prevented the public from knowing what it should know. It also was a progressive step that children were not fingerprinted. But this law has also to some ex-

tent turned against the interests of children. At the very time when murders and violent crimes by young children have become a serious social phenomenon, the Federal Government has no accurate statistics on them.

Even the libel laws can be and are used against the interests of children. Writers and editors are really frightened that the powerful comic-book industry will use these laws against its critics. I had two experiences of my own. I had written that in the "good" comic book *The Mysteries of Paris* blood shows beneath the bandage of a man whose eyes have been gouged out. The publisher demanded a retraction. But I stood my ground, because the blood was there.

The other instance also involved a "good" comic book. I had written an article for the *National Parent-Teacher Magazine* at their request, on "What Are Comic Books?" in which I said, "It is a great error not to realize that 'Western' comics are just crime comics in disguise. The comic book *Tom Mix*, for example, has the story of an insane killer who hacks off people's hands, with the bloody details fully illustrated."

After this article appeared I received a long-distance call from the editor in Chicago. She had been visited by a representative of the industry and also by their lawyer. She also received several letters. "They persist in threatening me with a libel action. They said that on account of the article they were losing a million a year." Later she sent me their letters. They objected to the one sentence in my article, calling it a "libelous reference," "untrue," "untruthful" and "inaccurate." They said the story was all about a "dummy." They demanded "a public retraction and correction," and threatened to turn the matter over to their attorney for libel action.

Naturally the editor was alarmed. So I wrote her describing the comic-book-story sequence in detail:

Early in the story "Hands Off" in *Tom Mix Western* there are three pictures showing a box in which are the hacked-off hands of a real man (not a dummy). One little boy, looking into

this box, says: "GULP! IT'S A PAIR OF HUMAN HANDS CUT OFF AT THE WRIST!"

The sheriff says: "JUMPIN' RATTLESNAKES! SOME LOW-DOWN MURDERIN' VARMINT CUT OFF A PORE FELLOW'S HANDS!"

In four pictures you see the human corpse (not a dummy), the hands of which were in the box.

The insane killer knocks out Tom Mix (in person, not a dummy) by socking him on the head (*CONK* in large yellow letters and a big splash of color) with a gun, hangs him (in person, not a dummy) by the wrists from a tree and holding in his hand a big ax red with blood says: ". . . I'M AGONNA CUT YORE HANDS JEST LIKE I DID FRISCO FRANK'S!"

In the next picture you see a further close-up of this hanging-by-the-wrists man (not dummy), a bloody ax swinging, and all.

After some more struggle and fighting and kicking, with more talk about cutting off the (real) man's hands, Tom Mix gets free. He constructs a dummy—which in the pictures is of course indistinguishable from a real man—and you see two close-ups with the insane killer and his ax, in two of which the hand is actually cut off. In two of them again the ax is red-stained, presumably with blood. And the dialogue reads: "HA! HA! THAR GOES ONE OF YORE HANDS, MIX! AND NOW TUR CUT OFF THE OTHER!"

It's only in the fourth picture before the end, in *one* balloon, that it is stated: "YOU JUST CHOPPED THE HANDS OFF OF A STUFFED FIGURE!" (Of course this is lost on the many children who just study the pictures and do not read the text.)

I ended my letter: "Far from retracting what I have written, I reaffirm that this Tom Mix story is a bloody crime story disguised as a 'Western' totally unfit for immature minds. And I hope that this example will help parents to see the methods by which the comic-book industry continues the corruption of children's minds. In a democratic society there is no other way

to cope with such an evil than a law—even if in one story, one of two handless corpses is a dummy.”

This letter was not published in the *Parent-Teacher*. The editor told me later that she telephoned to the publisher, telling him what it said, and told him that “if you people persist in threatening us, we will publish Dr. Wertham’s letter in full.”

Later she received a letter from the publishers which ran true to form for comic-book stories and comics publishers: “It [the Tom Mix story] is not a representative story and was purchased several years ago.” The letter also conceded that some of the comic books on the newsstands “are shocking, a disgrace and probably harmful to children.”

The trouble is that all this, except for my original article, is unknown to the public. There is another point, too. Supposing it had been true that an insane killer *had* only hacked off the hands of a dummy, would that be suitable for children?

Whenever there is any court action stemming from comic books the question of *what is in comic books* does not come up at all. The industry relies then on the constitutional guarantee of free speech. It draws people’s attention away from the real issue and veils the business in an idealistic haze. The framers of the Constitution and its amendments would certainly be surprised if they knew that these guarantees are used to sell to children stories with pictures in which men prowl the streets and dismember beautiful girls. The industry regards selling books to children as its prerogative, that is to say as a right to be exercised without external control. To use constitutional rights against progressive legislation is of course an old story. Theodore Roosevelt encountered it when he campaigned for pure food laws.

In these assertions of freedom in the case of comic books, just the opposite is concealed. “We are allowing ourselves,” said Virgilia Peterson, “in the name of free speech (oh, fatal misuse of a high principle) to be bamboozled into buying or letting our children buy the worst propaganda on the market.

It is a tyranny by a handful of unscrupulous people. It is as much a tyranny as any other on the face of the earth.”

What is censorship? The industry has obscured that by claiming that the publisher exercises a censorship over himself. That is not what censorship means. It means control of one agency by another. When Freud speaks of an internal censor in the human mind, he does not mean that instinctive behavior can control itself. He specifically postulates another agency, the superego, which functions as censor. The social fact is that radio, books, movies, stage plays, translations, do function under a censorship. So do newspaper comic strips, which all have to pass the censorship of the editor, who sometimes—as in the case of the *Newark News*—rejects advance proofs. Comic books for children have no censorship. The contrast between censorship for adults and the lack of it for children leads to such fantastic incongruities as the arrest of a girl in a nightclub for obscenity because she wrestles with a stuffed gorilla, when any six-year-old, for ten cents, can pore for hours or days over jungle books where real gorillas do much more exciting things with half-undressed girls than just wrestling.

It is a widely held fallacy that civil liberties are endangered or could be curtailed via children's books. But freedom to publish crime comics has nothing to do with civil liberties. It is a perversion of the very idea of civil liberties. It has been said that if comic books for children were censored on account of their violence “you couldn't have a picture of Lincoln's assassination in a textbook.” Would that be such a calamity? There are many other pictures of Lincoln's time and life that would be far more instructive. But the whole inference is wrong, in any case. A picture of Lincoln's assassination would be incidental to a book expounding larger themes. In crime comic books, murder, violence and rape *are* the theme.

There seems to be a widely held belief that democracy demands leaving the regulation of children's reading to the individual. Leaving everything to the individual is actually *not*

democracy; it is anarchy. And it is a pity that children should suffer from the anarchistic trends in our society.

When closely scrutinized, the objections to some form of control of comic books turn out to be what are psychologically called *rationalizations*. They rationalize the desire to leave everything as it is. The very newspaper, the *New York Herald Tribune*, which pioneered in comic-book critique, said editorially later: "Censorship cannot be set up in this one field without undermining essential safeguards in other fields." The example of Canada alone, and of Sweden and other countries, has shown how spurious this argument is. A committee set up by comic-book publishers stated at their first meeting that censorship is an "illegal method." That certainly confuses things. An editorial in the *New York Times* entitled "Comic Book Censorship" says on the one hand: "We think the comic books have, on the whole, had an injurious effect on children and in various ways"; but goes on to say: "Public opinion will succeed in making the reforms needed. To wait for that to happen is far less dangerous than to abridge freedom of the right to publish." How long are we supposed to wait? We have now waited for over a decade—and right now there are more and worse crime comic books than ever before. And would the forbidding of mad killers and rapers and torturers for children abridge the freedom of the *Times* to publish anything it wants to? Why should a newspaper that stands for the principle of publishing what is "fit to print" make itself the champion of those who publish what is unfit to print?

While the industry wants to put all the burden on the children to protect themselves as best they can against injurious influences, John Kieran has expressed his belief that books for little children *should* be censored: "They have their foods selected for them, and the same applies to books. If the right books are given very young children to read, if the reading habit is started early, then when the children grow up they can select their own books."

In the comic-book field the alternatives to censorship have been fully tried. Self-regulation—to the extent that it was really attempted—has completely failed. In connection with parent-teacher organizations and other similar groups there have been local committees evaluating comic books. Most of their work of wading through hundreds of comic books was originally undertaken with enthusiasm, but has of course bogged down. So would the work of a committee that had to sample all the items in a local drugstore to see that nobody gets harmed.

What must happen to the minds of children before parents will give up these amateurish extra-legal committee activities and ask for efficient, legal, democratic protection for their children?

Legal control of comic books for children is necessary not so much on account of the question of sex, although their sexual abnormality is bad enough, but on account of their glorification of violence and crime. In the reaction to my proposals I found an interesting fact: People are always ready to censor obvious crudity in sex. But they have not yet learned the role of temptation, propaganda, seduction and indoctrination in the field of crime and violence. Psychoanalytically we know a great deal about the repression of sexual impulses. But to apply that directly to the psychology of criminal and violent impulses is far too simple. The reading of corrupting literature is a significant contributing factor in the causation of criminal and violent acts of juveniles. How many more cases like those in California, in Canada, in Chicago, in Maine, in Pennsylvania, in Germany, in Australia, in New York, in England, must we have before we acknowledge scientifically and legally what the good sense of the people is recognizing more and more?

Whenever you talk to a lawyer about the legal curb of crime comic books he more likely than not will answer you: "Yes—but don't forget the Winters case." I heard this case mentioned so often as an argument (or rather, instead of an argument) that I decided to study it myself.

The Winters case is for the crime-comic-book industry what the lawyers call the case of main reliance. A bookdealer in New York was selling a magazine for adults containing articles with such titles as "Bargains in Bodies." The content of the magazine was nothing but crime and bloodshed illustrated with gruesome pictures of victims and other such material. Two thousand copies of this magazine were seized under a section of the penal law which prohibits publications "principally made up of . . . pictures or stories of deeds of bloodshed, lust or crime."

It took eight years from the time of the sale of the books to the final decision of the United States Supreme Court in Washington, which had the case for more than three of those years. The bookdealer was originally convicted. The conviction was upheld in higher courts and then reversed by the United States Supreme Court. When the United States Supreme Court reversed the decision it overruled the opinion of no less than seventeen (17) judges. And if one includes the dissenting judges of the U.S. Supreme Court, six (6) judges outweighed twenty (20). This does not indicate that some judges are good and some bad, or some right and some wrong. It does show that the judiciary with changing times has come up against a new social problem; namely, the necessity of censoring not only obscenity but also violence as well. The division of the Supreme Court is the reflection of a social conflict. It is the expression of the growing pains of democracy. The conflict pertains to the social control of what I have called *the new pornography*, the glorification of violence and sadism. It also pertains to the root problem of my studies, the protection of children against temptation, seduction and unfair punishment after they have succumbed.

In the Court of Appeals of the State of New York, Judge Loughran, expressing the opinion of the majority, wrote: "Collections of pictures or stories of criminal deeds of bloodshed or lust unquestionably can be so massed as to become vehicles for

inciting violent . . . crimes. . . ." He clearly distinguished this type of social harmfulness from the ordinary objections to sexual obscenity. He took into account the question of free speech and pointed out that the interest in controlling social harm far outweighs any value such a publication might be construed to have.

In the United States Supreme Court the majority overruled this opinion. They made the dubious assertion that such words as "obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, indecent or disgusting" are "well understood through long use in the criminal law." In contrast, they held that massing stories to incite crime and stories of deeds of bloodshed and violence is too "vague" and unclear. If they had looked into this literature for children, sold not in 2,000 copies but—at the very minimum—in 250,000 copies, they would have found fifty-two murders and patches of blood in one book and eighty-one acts of violence in another. There is nothing "vague" about that. In other words, they did not take into account fully Judge Cardozo's concept of the "morality of the community" because they did not know what was going on in the children's segment of the community. They actually objected to the New York law because it "does not limit punishment to the indecent and obscene"! They rejected the emerging new morality expressed by the New York State Court of Appeals.

I have no doubt that the next generation will regard Justice Frankfurter's dissenting opinion in the *Winters* case, in which Justice Jackson and Justice Burton concurred, as one of the great documents of legal and social philosophy of our time. He pointed out that the majority opinion could have been written by anybody who had never read the magazine in question. It is like playing "Hamlet without Hamlet." (Remember that this is exactly what the comic-book industry is doing and is permitted to do all along, with every legal case.) Justice Frankfurter pointed out "the bearing of such literature on juvenile delinquency." He took full account of the acknowledged fact that

there is uncertainty about the alleged "causes" of crime. But as I understand his opinion, since one does not know exactly the causes of crime and juvenile delinquency, that does not mean that one should not act. On the contrary, since one cannot be absolutely precise one should play safe with regard to dangerous influences on children.

Justice Frankfurter pointed out the heart of the problem when he considers it wrong to find "constitutional barriers to a state's policy regarding crime, because it may run counter to our inexpert psychological assumptions or offend our presuppositions regarding incitements to crime. . . ." That is exactly what happened in the case of crime comic books. Psychiatrists and lawyers were so convinced that delinquency must have obscure, hidden and complex causes that they closed their minds to my findings that simple factors may touch off complex mechanisms. Justice Frankfurter expressed that in this way: "It would be sheer dogmatism . . . to deny to the New York legislature the right to believe that the intent of the type of publications which it has proscribed is to cater to morbid and immature minds—whether chronologically or permanently immature. It would be sheer dogmatism to deny that in some instances, deeply embedded, unconscious impulses may be discharged into destructive and often fatal action." As an example Justice Frankfurter referred to a youth barely seventeen who killed the driver of a taxicab in Australia. This case came before the High Court of Australia which—more progressive than some of our courts—took into consideration that the boy "had on a number of occasions outlined plans for embarking on a life of crime, plans based mainly on magazine thrillers which he was reading at the time. They included the obtaining of a motor car and an automatic gun." I was surprised to find in the High Court of Australia and in the United States Supreme Court in Washington an acceptance of facts which troubled children, weeping mothers, impatient fathers and eager young psychiatric assistants had brought to my attention over and over again in

the dingy basement rooms of psychiatric clinics at Lafargue and in Queens!

Justice Frankfurter made it clear that such a law would not interfere with freedom of speech and certainly not with that of the legitimate writers, their publishers and booksellers, including those who write fictional or fact stories of crime: "Laws that forbid publications inciting to crime [are] not within the constitutional immunity of free speech." He tersely expressed the sense of the type of law that I had asked for in Boston with regard to children when he says that the state gives notice "that it is outlawing the exploitation of criminal potentialities."

When I asked for a law against children's crime comics I expressed the logical result of my clinical studies. But at the same time I was crystallizing and giving expression to the vague gropings of the more enlightened part of public opinion which seeks a curb on the rising tide of education for violence. Justice Frankfurter admirably translated this vague groping into verbal clarity by assuming that the legislators who framed the statute on which the Winters case is based had expressed their reasons in words. This, Justice Frankfurter said, is what they would or could have said:

"We believe that the destructive and adventurous potentialities of boys and adolescents and of adults of weak character . . . are often stimulated by collections of pictures and stories of criminal deeds of bloodshed or lust so massed as to incite to violent and depraved crimes against the person; and . . . we believe that such juveniles . . . do in fact commit such crimes at least partly because incited to do so by such publications, the purpose of which is to exploit such susceptible characters . . . such belief . . . is supported by our experience as well as by the opinions of some specialists qualified to express opinions regarding criminal psychology and not disproved by others . . . in any event there is nothing of possible value to society in such publications, so that there is no gain to the State, whether in edification or enlightenment or good of any

kind . . . and the possibility of harm by restricting free utterance through harmless publications is too remote and too negligible a consequence of dealing with the evil publications with which we are here concerned.”

From this legal document I derived courage in what through no wish of mine, but by its own logic, had developed into a contest with the crime-comic-book industry. What respect they had for freedom of expression I could see from one of the minor episodes. As my material accumulated I decided to put it in book form. One day one of the most prominent experts for the defense visited my prospective publisher and told him what an error it would be to publish a book by me. This expert said I was “completely wrong” in my ideas about comic books and that I “stand absolutely alone” in my opinions about them. It is certainly fortunate that there are still publishers whose respect for freedom of expression takes other forms than those of the comic-book industry!

In my attempts to formulate the principles of a children's-crime-comics law, I realized that it is necessary to introduce scientific public-health thinking for the protection of children's mental health. A large part of the mental-hygiene movement exists solely on paper. Concrete measures like those against comic books come up against all kinds of conventions and interests. There is a lot written and said about mental hygiene; but one point is usually forgotten: the mental-hygiene movement as a whole has not been very successful so far. We have not less, but more alcoholism. We certainly do not have fewer neuroses. We have more and more violent juvenile delinquency and drug addiction has invaded the schools. The reason for this relative failure is that mental hygiene has separated itself so much from other fields and has succumbed to an ostrich policy with regard to concrete social evils, explaining them away rather than helping to fight them. The intricacies of parent-child relationship explain a great deal, but they alone

cannot carry the weight of a really dynamic mental hygiene. The influences from outside the family must be added.

Laws in the service of preventive medicine do not necessarily deal with criminal intent. They cope with what the lawyers call public welfare offenses, dealing with food, drugs and sanitation. What I wanted to accomplish in these years was to add mental health to these categories.

Speaking of the food, drug and cosmetic act, an editorial in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* points out that legislation in these fields "stemmed from the unusual responsibility held by those who produce and handle such essentials as food and drugs." What I submit is that mental health is an even greater responsibility. That is why I advocated a public-health approach to the comic-book problem.

What should a public-health law accomplish? Its purpose is not the punishment of crimes, although as an example that may be necessary. When proposing a comic-book law I have often been told: "You can't make a law unless you enlighten the public first." Or: "Good laws cannot help when there are bad attitudes." Can't they? Over and over again the objection has been made to my proposals that you have to educate the people first. But if you look over the history of social betterment you will find that the law is the best instrument of adult education. If nothing else, a comic-book law would make people *think*. It would inform them that there are responsible people who take seriously the subtle harm that crime comics do. One of the functions of law is to inform the public.

The progress of public-health legislation has not been easy either. Theodore Roosevelt and LaGuardia, when they came out for laws controlling drugs and food, faced the same counter-arguments made now against comic-book laws. A good example of the obstacles in the path of public-welfare laws is a court case of 1892. A landlord had failed to provide running water on each floor of a large tenement house. That seems to us now a self-understood requirement of public health. But at that time

the Court of Appeals ruled: "There is no evidence, nor can the Court judicially know, that the presence and distribution of water on the several floors will conduce to the health of the occupants. . . . There is no necessity for legislative compulsion on a landlord to distribute water through the stories of his buildings; since, if the tenants require it, self-interest and the rivalry of competition are sufficient to secure it."

This is like what the comic-book industry and its experts and legal defenders say now: How can a court judicially know that a child needs good reading? Why not leave it all to the competition of the good books (leaving out the defenselessness of the tenants in the one case and of children in the other)?

It is no argument to say that many people have been exposed to a public-health hazard, as children are exposed to crime comics, without suffering any harm. Many people speed in automobiles, pass others on hills, ignore red lights, have defective lights and brakes, live in unsanitary dwellings, drink untested water or milk, eat uninspected meat, are exposed to all kinds of infectious diseases, are not vaccinated, and still are none the worse for it. But that does not do away with the need for safety and public-health laws. Public health aims to prevent possibilities, not to count casualties.

Mental health is just as important as physical health. Its protection should be based on the same kind of scientific clinical thinking as public health. The individualistic thinking in psychology becomes unscientific when applied to a mass problem of social life. Public-health legislation is not directed against the past injury to an individual, but against the potential future injury to all.

The threadbare argument that only the predisposed are potentially harmed by comic books is without merit from the point of view of public health. In the first place, it is not true. I have seen many troubled children and juvenile delinquents who were predisposed to achieving good things in life and were deflected from their course by the social environment of which

comic books are an important part. Postulating beforehand who will be harmed by what, has long been replaced in public-health thinking by scientific observation. During the great flu epidemic of 1918 we learned that many regular subway riders and slum dwellers were immune while strong young men from the country succumbed. There is not only a psychopathology, there is also an epidemiology of juvenile delinquency.

In public health we also have little sympathy with the claim that we do not have to prevent illness because if we rule out one factor people would get sick sooner or later anyway, if not with this disease then with something else. Yet that is how the comic-book industry and its experts reason.

Attention to the individual in mental hygiene is not decreased, but increased, if the mass effects of social causes are given their due. Preventive work is trying to bring it about that the circumstances injurious to people do not occur. In public-health thinking the generalization cannot be postponed until every detail is established. The clinical fact of the harm to some is the signal of the potential danger to all.

I had occasion to try out these ideas of mine in a totally different field—although at one point comic books were involved there, too. I was giving expert testimony in Wilmington in the Delaware test case concerning segregation in elementary and public schools. I presented to the court in detail the thesis that regardless of the quality or inequality of the physical facilities, the fact of segregation itself constitutes a definite hazard for the mental health of children.

Segregation in school is only one factor in the social context of other factors, I went on. One cannot postulate a fixed hierarchy of factors operative in every case. The very fact that these children are exposed to race prejudice in other spheres highlights the school segregation. In this connection I mentioned the race prejudice taught in comic books. The court accepted my public-mental-health point of view and ordered the children admitted to the schools from which they had been excluded.

The analogy with the comic-book question is obvious. But whereas in the case of school segregation something new was accomplished, with crime comic books the same reasoning did not work.

One obstacle was the attitude of some writers, editorialists and columnists on child welfare whose minds are closed to something new. They regard juvenile delinquents as if they were totally different from other children. Even liberal writers write of "the mark of Cain which an evil destiny brands on some of our children." They believe that emotionally strong children are unaffected, while only emotionally insecure children are exposed. This is pure speculation. It means the distinction between an invulnerable élite and a vulnerable common group. Reflect what snobbishness is involved.

He is a naughty child, I'm sure—
Or else his dear papa is poor.

Even when they write about comic books—asserting that they have nothing to do with normal children's troubles or with juvenile delinquency, however—they admit that comic books are "lurid enough to chill the blood"; that they have a "potentially adverse effect on juvenile culture generally"; that they show a "sly, smutty suggestiveness"; that "sadism" is a "key motif"; and that comic books "demonstrate pictorially to the child reader how to gouge eyes with the thumb, kick in the stomach, bite ears" and other such "dangerous information." These quotations are from a book on juvenile delinquency by Albert Deutsch. Despite all these admissions, he denies firmly that comic books may be a "significant factor in child delinquency" and even denies that they have anything at all to do with the violent forms of delinquency.

Juvenile delinquency cannot be regarded as a self-contained entity. Children's behavior does not fall into such rigid classifications. If you take a hundred delinquent children and a hundred non-delinquent children, you will find that the difference

between them is not one of ingrained emotional make-up, but one of socio-psychological circumstances. It is only human (and scientific) to realize that just a hairline separates the child who does not get into trouble from the one who does. The belief that delinquent children are totally different from others is one reason why they are so harshly treated. Even the difference between a mild delinquent act and a serious one is not the difference between black and white. I have seen children at every stage of this sequence: A young boy experiments in talking about sex with a little girl; he has the impulse to inspect her; he experiments; he wants her not to tell; he threatens her with one of his comic-book-bought knives; he really harms her. Is it reasonable to assume that each act has a different causation, the serious act a "very deep" cause and the mild act a very superficial one?

Deutsch states that "emotionally healthy children are unharmed by them." If sadism, as he himself says, is a motif of this children's literature, must the children be emotionally unhealthy to get sadistic ideas from it? That is contrary to all human and scientific experience.

He also uses the ostrich argument that the child-delinquency rate "was actually declining." It was not. Moreover, delinquency statistics are most unreliable. Whenever a social or private agency needs more appropriations or contributions to combat juvenile delinquency, the delinquency rate goes up; when they make reports accounting for the money spent, the rates go down. The rosy statistics offered by the New York City Youth Board in 1953 are a case in point. About three facts there can be no doubt: Delinquency rates are at present very high; the nature of the delinquencies has become more violent; the age of the delinquents has become lower.

Harper's magazine, in its "Personal & Otherwise" department, has been taking up cudgels for the comic-book institution. The statement that the increased brutality in juvenile delinquency and the mass production of crime comic books are

related "got our blood pressure up," they admit. As a doctor, of course I deplore that, not only for their sake but because the injustice done to children both before they commit delinquencies and afterwards needs calm reflection as well as knowledge of the facts.

The violence is, in P. & O.'s opinion, the "product of a moral and social confusion." How can one better defend the status quo than by blaming something so vague and general, to the exclusion of concrete facts? P. & O. reproaches me for oversimplification and states that I neglect socio-economic conditions. Does he think that comic books drop from heaven? They are a clear expression of economic conditions and are a part of the social environment of these children.

P. & O. finds my case against the comic books "full of holes." One of these holes is that they do not contain any more violence than *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or *The Last of the Mohicans*. For a literary critic in a good magazine this is a shocking statement to make. Are girls strung up by their ankles in these books? Are their acts of violence fully illustrated so that you can see blood gushing, cut-off shapely legs, and corpses disposed of in every conceivable manner? More important, these books are art, they have nuances of descriptive narrative and they have a theme which is *not* the theme of violence. P. & O. also defends the thesis of so many other writers in connection with comic books, that demonstrably bad reading matter does not have demonstrably bad effect on children. I have found that it does.

When such writers defend crime comic books so vehemently, what are they actually defending? The very inconsistency of their arguments makes one wonder. Crime comics are a severe test of the liberalism of liberals.

And so it went. The writers discussed the "problems," the public thought comics were getting better, the industry flourished. One day in the Queens General Mental Hygiene Clinic I was visited by an older and very influential professional friend.

After some friendly preliminaries he hesitated and cleared his throat.

"You know," he said, "you do it all wrong. Why do you have to keep on doing this work with comic books? The research is all right. But why do you have to talk about practical solutions? That is bad for your reputation. It is petty. You have stated your results. Now if you do absolutely nothing, the people will come to you for advice. But you go on and want to *change* something! You have written articles about comic books. Why do you have to ask for a law and get into the fight? If you keep on acting like this, you'll be marked."

It really seemed for quite a while that Superman had licked me. But then, as so often happens, things took a new turn. It came in the form of a telephone call from Washington. Would I be willing to confer with the chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee to Investigate Organized Crime on the subject of crime and juvenile delinquency? I agreed to do so and a few weeks later the senator came to my apartment, for what turned into a long conference. He told me that while his committee was mainly interested in organized crime in interstate commerce, he was concerned about children. He had inquired in Washington whom to consult and several high officials had given him my name. He added that President Truman had urged him especially to look into the childhood roots of criminal behavior.

I had on my desk a speech President Truman had made a short while before in which he asked for "prevention and cure" and for "wholesome recreation." "If those children," the President had said, "have the proper environment at home, and educationally, very, very few of them ever turn out wrong. . . . I am particularly anxious that we should do everything in our power to protect the minds and hearts of our children from moral corruption. . . . We must not permit the existence of conditions which cause our children to believe that crime is inevitable and normal."

"You know, Senator," I said, "there is a strong organized force in our society which does exactly the opposite of what the President wants. It provides unwholesome recreation, it claims that many children will go wrong whatever influences they are exposed to, it exposes them to moral corruption and leads them to believe that crime is normal. Why not investigate this force, the crime-comic-book industry?"

"Oh, I've heard about them," he replied. "Those horror books that describe the perfect murder or some other crime, ostensibly for educational purposes."

The senator combined a certain dignity with what seemed to be a sincere homespun friendliness, and he seemed eager to do something for children. I told him that for a number of years I had been making clinical investigations on the subject in three different clinics.

"Can you show me some of your material?" he asked. I showed him comic books, clinical records, converted toy guns. We spent some time going critically over the evidence in a manner that reminded me that he was a lawyer.

He explained to me the tremendous power that his committee had. They could subpoena anybody and anything, question witnesses under oath, trace business transactions and scrutinize whole industries. What could the committee do about this? Was there anything the Federal Government could do?

"The Federal Government does not even have accurate statistics on murders and violent acts committed by children," I said. "Any child who can write his name can order a dangerous switchblade knife from comic books' advertisements. With these knives countless children have been threatened and coerced and injured. The Federal Government seems to be the only agency with the power to ascertain the truth. How many crime comic books are there that glorify crime? I don't mean guesses and propaganda figures, but actual printing-orders, sales, shipments abroad, and so on."

"Could something be done with interstate commerce?" he asked.

"That has been suggested," I said. "For example, Nevada has passed a resolution requesting Congress to regulate comic books by law." And I explained that I thought the evidence would show the necessity for a law—possibly on an interstate commerce basis—that would prevent the sale and display of crime comic books to children under fifteen.

Then and there he appointed me as psychiatric consultant to his committee. I made my co-operation dependent on some conditions: that the far-flung propaganda of the industry would be scrutinized; that there would be a careful legal investigation of tie-in sales, juvenile drug addiction and childhood prostitution; that the recruiting of children for work with adult gangs and racketeers be investigated; that illustrations from comic books would be used.

He agreed to all that, reiterating the enormous powers he had and his paramount wish to do something for children. His final inquiry was whether I thought the public would be interested in such an investigation.

Soon afterwards he wrote to thank me, sent me messages and conferred with me by telephone from Washington. Aides of the committee came to me and I outlined for them in detail preliminary steps. I can't say that I expected this to lead to a curb of the industry, but I did think that there would be at least some kind of an investigation.

Questionnaires went out to a number of people. Then the whole thing stopped abruptly—or maybe it was just that it took a different direction.

I was on vacation when I got a wire saying that the committee contemplated publication of a report on juvenile delinquency and wanted a written contribution from me for inclusion in the report. Of course I refused, replying that such a hasty publication without investigation was certainly not in the interests of the public.

The next thing I heard was a news broadcast from Washington: "Crime Comic Books have nothing to do with juvenile delinquency, Senator Kefauver reported today." Next day there were front-page headlines: STUDY FINDS DOUBT COMICS SPUR CRIME, and: COMICS DON'T FOSTER CRIME, and: FBI HEAD DISCOUNTS HARMFUL EFFECTS OF CRIME COMIC BOOKS. Editorials elaborated. The *Times* editorial stated that the majority opinion of child-guidance experts was "that there is no direct connection between the comic books dealing with crime and juvenile delinquency"; that "the facts show that some comic books are read more by adults than by children" (it did not mention *whose* "facts"); and that "it is the emotional make-up the child brings to his life experiences that conditions his reactions to them" (in other words, it's all the child's own fault again).

The *Sunday News* editorial commented: "It's a pleasure to pass along the news that Senator Estes Kefauver's Senate Crime Investigating Committee has now gone deeply into the subject of the crime comic books and has brought up a mass of testimony which ought to spur the earnest souls to look around for something else to worry about. . . . The Kefauver Committee took its testimony largely from unprejudiced sources. . . . The verdict of the majority gave a clean bill of health to the comics. So we hope that the public has heard the last of this earnest-soul gripe."

Why is it a front-page story that comic books do *not* have any effect?

Ironically enough, it was I who had inadvertently given the crime-comic-book industry the biggest advertising it had ever had!

I got hold of the published report of the Senate Crime Investigating Committee and studied it. At the taxpayers' expense it prints statistical charts on the frequency of juvenile delinquency prepared by—the comic-book industry! It reprints the whole comic-book issue of the scientific journal edited by one

expert for the defense, with contributions by three experts for the defense (and one article entirely devoted to newspaper comic strips, which has nothing at all to do with comic books) and with one article devoted only to attacking me. It contains unchecked statements by crime-comic-book publishers, some of whom brazenly defy the most modest requests made by the committee: "Our organization has published hundreds of titles and issues of comic magazines during the past ten years, and it would be an impossible task to begin to answer. . . ." (this in reference to questions about circulation and income from comic books). There are no illustrations, although I had been assured there would be.

The report gives the opinions of eight "child guidance experts." Two of them are not and do not claim to be child-guidance experts. Both are lawyers. One of the other experts is designated editorially in the report as a doctor, although she is not, and as a psychiatrist, which she is not either. *Five* of the eight experts, according to the report itself, are or have been employed by the comic-book industry—some for as long as ten years! It is these five experts who say that comic books are all right. The three independent experts condemn comic books severely. The division is clear-cut: Those connected with the comic-book industry defend comic books; those independent of the industry consider them harmful. It needed no Senate inquiry to tell us this.

The report also contains replies to a questionnaire from probation officers and other officials, most of whom had never thought of studying the influence of crime comic books. They had not even asked prisoners or children in their charge about comic-book reading. Some of them speak unblushingly about "the consistent decrease" of juvenile delinquency. There are some condemnations of crime comics, including the case example of the little boy comic-book reader who leaped from a telephone pole believing himself to be Superman.

The report bristles with all the clichés and platitudes that

have ever been uttered in defense of comic books: that they are too simple an explanation; that the children would do it anyhow; that comic books are here to stay; that they give release of aggressive instincts; that children who do something wrong have "definite antisocial tendencies" in the first place; that only unstable children become unstable and comic books have "no effect on the emotionally well-balanced boy or girl"; that a judge calmed a child witness down by handing him a pile of comic books; that comic books make an impression only on "impressionable minds"; and so on and on. And all this is published without comment, without analysis, without any investigation whatsoever, and with only a minimum of editing—and that mostly wrong.

Omitted from the report are items that would have belonged there. For example, the answer to their inquiry by the president of the Newport Council of Social Agencies, a psychiatric social worker with a great deal of experience with children, which states that from her contact with children in Washington, D.C. and in Rhode Island she had become increasingly aware of the link between comic books and delinquency and had had "contact with non-delinquent minors whose cultural background seemed solidly rooted in this literature." Omitted also is the testimony before the committee of one of the most experienced criminologists and penologists in the country, Mr. James V. Bennett, secretary of the Criminal Law Section of the American Bar Association and director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. He had told the committee that crime comic books are connected with crime and asked for an investigation into the business of crime comic books, "the traffic in which now amounts to seventy million copies a month . . ." (this was in 1950).

After the report was published one of the senator's aides telephoned me that the senator wanted me to know that "his whole statement had been twisted in the press," that I "should have faith in him" and that "he's determined to do it the way he said to you." That was the last I ever heard.

A few weeks after the report was out I received a letter from a prominent member and committee chairman of the American Bar Association. "I was very much disappointed," he wrote, "in the publication of the Kefauver report. And I think a serious mistake has been made in its publication. It is unfortunate that so much of it is from media sources and from persons in the employ of or under obligation to the media."

As for me, I learned a great deal from this report. It taught me that comic books really are a test of the reaction of a society not only to children's literature but to children themselves. Assume for a moment that a senate committee with such unlimited powers had investigated the raising of hogs. Would they not have informed themselves and the farmers a little better?

The further history of the Kefauver Committee's crime investigation is well known. It was referred to in television circles as "the biggest hit of the season." Arthur Miller wrote that he was struck by "the air of accomplishment among the people that is really not warranted by the facts." I do not entirely agree with this. I think these hearings actually did accomplish something: They demonstrated not only the link between politics and crime, but also the link between politics and crime investigation.

I kept on with my studies as before. There were always new comic books and always new children. I was not in the mood to participate in any more investigations. But my telephone rang again: The New York State Legislature had appointed a Joint Legislative Committee to Study the Publication of Comics. Would I collaborate with them as a psychiatric expert, help them in their investigation and testify on the effects of comic books on children?

I had become a little skeptical of investigating committees. Superman always seemed to get the best of them. So I asked to be excused. But later on when the committee got in touch with me again I changed my mind and agreed. I had convinced my-

self that this committee had gone at its work seriously and sincerely. They wanted to get at the facts and in all fairness had given the comic-book industry every break. They started with the premise that no law was necessary and gave the industry more than two years' time to make some kind of improvement by self-regulation.

During one of the first conversations I had with members of this committee to study comics, one of them said to me, "The general counsel of the Association of Comics Magazine Publishers said to me, 'Somewhere right now a little boy has a gun and reads crime comics. That boy will be president some day.' What do you say to that?"

"All I can say," I answered, "is that that is precisely what I would like to prevent."

I testified for the committee, at length and under oath, on two separate occasions separated by an interval of a year. With many examples from comic books and children's cases I testified to what I had seen and found, what I had done and thought. The main bad effect of crime comic books on children, I said, is on their ethical development. I made it clear that I was not saying this as a moralist, but as a doctor who believes that orientation as to what is right and wrong is part of normal mental health. I explained that juvenile delinquency is only one part of the crime-comic-book question, although a very serious one. The greatest danger of crime comic books is to the normal child.

I answered the counterarguments of the industry, like the one about law and order winning. A typical crime story has this ending: "And so the story ends in blood, as it began in murder."

What about the crime comic books, I was asked, that are educational and teach children not to commit delinquencies? I have never seen one, I answered. If you find one, I shall be glad to return and modify my statements.

When I testified the second time the committee had con-

vinced itself that the proclaimed self-regulation of the industry had completely failed and some legal control was necessary. On that occasion, again under oath, I pointed out that the cover of the comic book draws the child's attention to a crime, the text describes one, the pictures show how it's done and the advertisements provide the means to carry it out.

For years I had been seeing children who get into trouble with switchblade knives. I had bought several of these knives, signing a child's name on the order, in answer to comic-book advertisements. When I testified before this committee for the second time, I produced one of them quickly, as I was talking, flashing open its blade. A switchblade knife is a good symbol of the crime-comic-book industry as a whole. Then I outlined my idea about a public-health law against the threat comic books offer to the general mental health of children. The law is not concerned with what doctors think, but with what they can prove. Many comic-book stories are nothing but perverse and violent fantasies of adults and it is these perverse fantasies that are sold to children. Censorship legislation requires a "clear and present danger." My idea of a public-health law is totally different. Anything clear or unclear, present or future, which under any circumstances may cause damage or harm to health, can be controlled by legislation. There is only one question: Is it harmful or not? Such a law could enlighten the public, just as laws about hoof and mouth disease enlighten farmers about livestock. I am not a lawyer, but from a medico-legal point of view I would suggest that the sale and display of crime comic books to children under fifteen be forbidden.

The committee, which had taken the testimony of sixty-two witnesses, accepted my findings and my suggestions. They issued altogether three reports. In the first "Interim Report," before I testified, they made this important observation: "It is strange but true that the questions heretofore propounded to individuals charged with greater or lesser crimes by probation officers have not touched upon the question of the reading of

comics.” (Compare with the Kefauver committee which published unanalyzed the uninformed opinions on crime comics of just such probation officers.)

The second report concludes that crime comic books “impair the ethical development of children” and are “a contributing factor leading to juvenile delinquency.” It states that “the comics which sell best are crime comics.”

The third report contained the committee’s legislative proposals. The chairman, Assemblyman Joseph F. Carlino, stated that the bills were the result of the failure of the comic-book industry to “realize their public responsibility and, in the cause of common decency, take up the necessary steps to set up self-regulatory provisions.”

The committee’s report states: “The publishers and their representatives . . . completely rejected and refused to recognize the reality that children are influenced and stimulated by what they read, see and hear in the same way in which adults are influenced or stimulated.”

It calls crime comic books “a threat to the health of children” and concludes that the committee “has been obliged to recommend the adoption of legislative controls. It had no more choice in doing so than it would have in suppressing disease-causing acts which were found to be a threat to the public health or safety.”

Before the law proposed by the committee was voted on by the legislature, it was publicly opposed by the Association of Comics Magazine Publishers, the New York State Council of Churches, the Mystery Writers of America, the American Civil Liberties Union and other organizations.

The technical aspects of the bill had been worked out most carefully by the committee. They had done research on the Winters case, the Los Angeles County case, the Chicago case and other legal cases having a bearing on such a law. Their legal consultant was Reuben A. Lazarus, an authority on constitutional law and on bill drafting. He had drafted more bills

affecting the City of New York than any other person, living or dead, and is responsible for the present New York City charter. So if there was any legal authority to judge the constitutionality of the proposed law, it was this comics committee's legal consultant. The committee's bill was drafted and redrafted in many conferences; the head of the New York State Legislative Bill Drafting Committee, Theodore E. Bopp, participated and members of his legal staff passed on it.

When the crime-comic-book control bill came before the Assembly, they voted for it: 141 to 4. The Senate voted for it, too, unanimously.

So it really seemed that a step forward had been made. But Governor Dewey attended to that. He vetoed the bill, giving as his reason that "it fails to meet fundamental constitutional requirements." Superman has many disguises.

This decision was strange. When Columbia University Press published its educational comic book *Trapped* which deals with juvenile drug-addiction, Governor Dewey stated: "It is a superb job. I hope millions of copies are distributed." (They could not distribute more than 30,000.) If the governor thinks that a single "good" comic book can do so much good, should he not have refrained from interfering with the democratic will of the parliamentary majority which believed that hundreds of millions of bad comic books can do so much harm?

When I discussed this outcome with my associates in the comic-book research I was pleased to note that they were not discouraged by it. Nor was I. But I was bothered by something else. I had lunch one day with Henrietta Additon, an authority on delinquency and penology for whom I have the greatest admiration. She had another guest, the head of a civic committee on children and a woman with great influence in such matters. In the course of lunch I asked this guest what she thought about crime comic books. She answered, "I know there are people for them and people against them. I don't take any side. I am absolutely neutral."

At that moment it became clear to me for the first time that I was defeated. This business of not taking sides on the part of those who could help to make conditions easier for the young to grow up, was more deadly than Kefauver's desertion or Dewey's veto. Neutrality—especially when hidden under the cloak of scientific objectivity—that is the devil's ally.

XIII

Homicide At Home

Television and the Child

*“They dare not devise good for man’s estate.
And yet they know not that they do not dare.”*

—Shelley

To lump all mass media of entertainment together as if they were equal is often both erroneous and misleading. Of course they have many similarities, but they also have fundamental differences. That is very correctly recognized by the law, as in the decision of the United States Supreme Court in voiding the ban of a movie: "Nor does it follow that motion pictures are necessarily subject to the precise rules governing any other particular method of expression. Each method tends to present its own peculiar problems." A commodity like crime comics which is not a legitimate medium of entertainment for children can only profit if it is discussed not for what it is, but under the general name of mass media. It is true that some crime movies are as brutal as comic books, but these movies are not specifically merchandised for children. You can almost recognize a comic-book publicist by the frequency with which he speaks of "mass media," "mass media of communication," etc., when he is really just defending comic books. To class comic books in terms of mass media is to class starlings as songbirds. Of course songbirds and starlings are all birds.

A committee of the National Education Association, after studying "The Effects of Mass Media upon Children and the School Program," reported that "mass media including radio, television, motion pictures, comic books, current periodicals, and other communication means which have become an integral part of modern life affect human behavior to such an extent that it is the responsibility not only of the teacher and the parent, but also of all other community agencies to build a higher level of what we might call 'taste' on the part of the consumer." This is much too general and superficial to be of any use. Lumping all the media together has done some of them an injustice, while serving as a protective screen for crime comics. Legitimate methods of control of one may not apply to the other. Some media have done themselves considerable harm by making common cause with crime comics in opposing control of them. They feared, of course, that any control would spread to them.

What does happen is that if the crime comics industry continues to lead a charmed life, the other media will be more exposed to the very censorship which they want to avoid. Pocket books are facing the danger of this creeping censorship right now. *It is not censorship of children's crime comics, but its complete absence that threatens other media with unwanted controls.* Quite apart from the fear of censorship, the defense of comic books stems from the inverted snobbishness of some who defend the right of what they consider the lower orders to read any trash sold to them.

In our studies we found marked differences between the media in their effect on children. The passivity is greatest in reading comic books, perhaps a little less with television, if only because often other people are present in the audience. In both, the entertainment flows over the child. Passivity is least in going to movies, where others are always present. The media have their maximum appeal at different ages. Movies seem to have the greatest appeal from eleven to twenty-one, television roughly from the ages of four to twelve. The time spent with different media varies, too. Comic books have the greatest hold on many children. Once in the Hookey Club when crime shows on television were discussed, an eleven-year-old boy said: "Television is bad, but it doesn't stay with you like a comic book." The mother of an eight-year-old girl said to me: "Television is not half so bad. It is the comic books. They are handy. They are ten cents. They are always around. They don't just read them once, they read and re-read them, from the bathroom to the kitchen and back." Children literally live with comic books.

What is said of one medium may be totally untrue of another. I know many people, children and adults, who have turned to read the original book after seeing an adaptation in the movies. The examples include such authors as Henry James, Tolstoy, Bernard Shaw, Jules Verne, Theodore Dreiser, Hawthorne, Emily Brontë. In all these years we have not found a

single child who turned from a comic-book adaptation to the original. And yet experts for the defense of comic books, mixing together the media whenever possible, make this one of their chief claims.

Radio, movies and television are considered worthy of regular serious critiques in newspapers. Nothing like this exists for comic books. Nor is it even possible, for the few critics who have written about them find them subjects for toxicology rather than criticism.

Yet the different media are not mutually exclusive. Some of them blend very well; when they blend with comic books it is always in their worst aspects. There are radio comic books, TV comic books and movie comic books. But the great inroads that television was expected to make—and for a short time seemed to have made—have not materialized. The movies killed the dime novel, but television did not even wound the comic-book industry. The low order of literacy of television fitted in well with the almost total illiteracy of crime comics.

One can often learn about one medium from observation of another. My conclusion that children reading crime comic books often identify themselves with the powerful villain has often been challenged by wishful thinkers. It was borne out by a brilliant review of the television show "Senate Crime Investigation" by Fern Marja. This review was some of the best reporting of that memorable performance when for the first time organized crime was made a drawing card in a show with the criminals themselves and their prosecutors as the chief stars. "It is difficult to tell," she wrote, "whether the secret of the legislators' popularity is their identification with good or their necessary contact with evil. And Frank Costello is beginning to threaten the supremacy of Hopalong Cassidy as a TV attraction. . . . Is the racketeering boss hero or villain to the general public?" And later when the district attorneys were testifying she noted: "Imperceptibly, at first, the mood of the chamber changes. Here and there a yawn is visible. Mr. X and Mr. Y [the district attor-

neys] are men of good will, but they lack Costello's drawing-power. It is almost impossible to escape the conclusion that honesty bores the gallery. . . . A spectator stirs restlessly. 'Listen,' he says to an attendant, 'when's Costello coming back? That's what I want to see!' " If true of adults, why not of children? Others made similar observations. John Crosby, the New York *Herald Tribune's* radio and television critic, reported that it had been noted that "large segments of the population showed a tendency to sympathize with the witnesses, no matter how shady their past." And a newspaper editorial at the time wondered "whether these exhibitions will (not) add to the glamor of crime in many people's imaginations."

The study of comic books is indispensable for understanding what happens in less overt form in other media. If one has studied comic books one recognizes sadism for sadism's sake even if it is embellished with psychological thrills, as in some movies, radio and TV programs.

The mass media have power for good or ill, on society and on the individual. No amount of facile theorizing can explain that away. They present a new ethical problem. And if at present they do so much harm, the industries themselves by their own momentum evidently cannot remedy that. This became especially clear to me when I heard a high television-executive say that if all violence and horror were removed from comic books and television everything in the world would remain the same. That unethical type of argument has been made at every step of progress mankind has ever made, be it aseptic, vaccination or meat inspection.

One thing true of all the media is that many people glibly discount their influence on children. But they have a continuous impact on masses of children that would have been unheard-of in former times and they really mediate between the child and his environment. For example, in the most lurid crime stories the final defeat of the villain is supposed to cancel out his previous triumphs and achievements. That is psychologically naive.

The lesson these stories usually convey to children is not that the villain should have been better, but that he should have been shrewder. In other media, especially in television, this extolling of the villain exists, too, although it is seldom as raw as in comic books.

The race ridicule and nationality stereotypes of comic books is also spread to some extent through other media. The mayor of the city of New York has commented severely on the race prejudice shown in television murder mysteries. (He did not mention the race prejudice in comic books which is much more widespread and harmful and about which he could do something, since they are sold on newsstands on city property.) The excuses for not interfering with this are the same for all media.

Whenever the question of the harm done by mass media is raised, the easy retort is that it is all up to the family. But the family itself is invaded with an all-round amphibious offensive. Take a peaceful American family on a quiet evening. Papa rests from his work and is reading Mickey Spillane. Junior has just come home from a movie with a "DOUBLE-SHOCK SHOW: The Vanishing Body and The Missing Head." He settles down to look at one of those good crime television shows where a man is beaten up so mercilessly that he is blinded for life. His older sister, just this side of puberty, is engrossed in the comic book *Reform School Girl!*, which blends sex, violence and torture in its context. (The advertisements in comic books have been worrying her about her development and she has just discovered the secret solution, the "BULGE-MASTER" [\$5.98], advertised in this book.) Mama had been invited for the evening to see an avant-garde film. But when she read the title of the program, "Meditation on Violence," she decided to stay home instead and use the evening to keep abreast of the latest in child psychology. Recently she had attended the Illinois Congress for Parents and Teachers and heard the director of the Association for Family Living propound: "Hostility is one of the basic emotions and has to be expressed someplace. Home is the best place to do it."

So she got herself two recent books on psychology. One has the title *Children Who Hate*, the other is a psychological textbook with twenty-five chapters in which the only psychological subject to which a whole chapter is devoted is "Hostility."

In other words, papa, mama, and the two children are all subjected to the impact of the same current fashion, the extolling of hostility and violence.

It is essential to recognize that the various media have an influence on one another although that is not generally realized. The newer medium may influence the older. It is well known that the movies have influenced the theater. We speak of a television-level melodrama in the movies and a comic-book-level show on television. The paradox is this: All the mass media together have influence on the child, but each follows separate laws. And the lowest medium, the only illegitimate one as far as children are concerned, the crime comic has in fact the greatest influence on all the other media.

In the last half-decade or so crime comics have influenced all the media in some degree. In that sense one can speak of a comic-book culture, especially for children. Comic books have been in competition with the other media not only with regard to money but with regard to children's minds as well. I have not found, as many would have us believe, that the good influence of the legitimate media makes comic books better, or restricts their circulation. On the contrary, comic books make the other media worse. It is true, as is always pointed out by comic-book defenders, that crime and horror shows existed long before comic books. But there is a new special touch—blatant, crude and shameless—that the other media now have to absorb, imitate and rival in order to be able to compete with the comic-book industry. Children's minds have been molded to strong sadistic fare. If he does not slap the girl around, what kind of a he-man is the hero? If he does not strangle her or poison her, where is the excitement? And if there is no murder, where is the plot? So it is not possible to improve children's shows on tele-

vision or radio as long as crime comic books are left the way they are.

Some time ago I saw a Western movie in which the villain shoots the sheriff straight in the face. It was a children's matinee and at that point the children first laughed and then loudly applauded. This was not the so-called natural cruelty of children that adults like to speak about. This particular type of response was inculcated in these children by the most persistent conditioning in habits of hate ever given to children in the world's history.

There is at present in all the media, especially as they affect children, a pattern of violence, brutality, sadism, blood-lust, shrewdness, callous disregard for human life and an ever-renewed search for subhuman victims, criminal, racial, national, feminine, political, terrestrial, supernatural and interplanetary. Brutality is the keynote. It is self-understood that such a pattern in a mass medium does not come from nothing. There must be clues in real life as to why violence is in the air.

Children need proper food, vitamins, fresh air, games and schooling and love. Nowadays there is a dogma that they also need stories about violence and crime. Formerly hostility was concealed. Psychiatrists in those times would not admit that an ordinary boy could hate his father or a daughter, her mother. Bernard Shaw wrote about that, but the psychiatrists didn't. Now the pendulum has swung the other way. The same type of dogmatic person who formerly saw only sweetness and light and physical or hereditary causes now says that knowing about violence and sadism adjusts children to the world. What kind of a world, and what kind of an adjustment?

The quantity of violence in all the media is stupendous. It has become almost a national pastime for committees of women's clubs to count the murders in children's programs during a week. But quantity alone does not give the real picture. *Hamlet* is not just a play about violence. It has a plot, poetry, character development, philosophy, psychology. And yet, in

the course of the play Hamlet kills five people. It is the context that counts, not the quantity.

Granted that this cult of violence originates somewhere in our social life, there is a dynamic reciprocal relationship between the audience and the creators of mass entertainment. The same influences come to bear on both producers and audience. Gradually, through constant reiteration, brutality is accepted and the producers can say that this is what the children (and adults) wanted in the first place. In speaking of children they use the refinement of a false argument by saying that this is what children *need*. The audience, on the other hand, feels that this is what it is supposed to like, in order to be virile and up-to-date. So there is a vicious circle, with normal business needing morbid audiences and healthy audiences spoiling normal business. The aberration becomes the norm and the norm creates the aberration.

What all media need at present is a rollback of sadism. What they do to children is that they make them confuse violence with strength, sadism with sex, low necklines with femininity, racial prejudice with patriotism and crime with heroism.

If one studies this phenomenon carefully, one will see that in this orchestra of violence the comic-book industry has set the tone and the rhythm. For a while, before 1945, it seemed that the crime-comic-book industry had a monopoly on the brutalization of children. Now it has some competition from television and the other media. So children may get the idea that violence is natural from any or all of the media, as well as from other children exposed to these media too. In the Hookey Club a boy once described a movie where the hero strangled the girl. "Why did he have to strangle her?" I asked. The answer was "Well, there has to be some adventure in the world." The story is told of the two little boys who had gone to see a romantic movie. "It was boring," said one. "Not to me," said the other. "I didn't mind. Whenever they kissed I closed my eyes and pretended he was choking her."

In a competitive way the media influence each other in the direction of the ritual of violence. Crime comic books influence television and radio, both of them influence the movies.

In all this consideration of other media one should never lose sight of the fact that, in complete contrast to comic books, movies—and radio as well—are an enormous educational influence, that they have given us unforgettable artistic experiences and that they are indispensable instruments of what could be best in our culture. To some extent this is also beginning to be true of television.

To trace the influence of one medium upon the other is as difficult as tracing influences in the history of literature. But there are clear indications which can be unearthed. Pocket-size books for adults have become a mass medium, too. Excellent books have been published in this form—novels, stories, non-fiction, detective stories, etc. But here too a pattern of crudest sadism on the level of comic books is discernible. This is the announcement of one of these pocket-size books:

— was having trouble with women. The first one was dead—strangled in her bed as she waited for her business-man-lover to come out of the shower. The second had a lovely name, a lovely face and an even lovelier bosom. The third was a frustrated widow. Her alcoholic strip tease in X's apartment left him cold—but she was much colder later on, with a bullet through her heart . . . a tasty dish for those who like their crime stories rough, tough and sexy.

Sounds like a children's book! Certainly it is a book for adolescent-minded readers brought up on crime comics.

Some pocket-size books express nothing but the *pornography of violence*, which derives from crime comics directly or indirectly. Some of the worst are to be found in places where juveniles buy candy and sodas and find large displays of the worst crime comic books. What do the publishers of these specimens do to justify them? They follow the trail blazed by the

comic-book industry and have their most questionable products endorsed by a psychiatrist. In the book-publishing trade that is something new. It is a direct lesson from psychiatrist-endorsed comic books. One such pocket-size book has a brief endorsement by a "Renowned New York Psychiatrist." He writes that the book is "an authentic picture of nymphomania," it is "educational," it gives "a true picture of nymphomania," it is "clinically accurate" and "certainly the wider the knowledge of man's ills, whether they be of the mind or body, the greater the progress toward the cure."

The high point of the book is the detailed description of the heroine poisoning her lover. He is in horrible agony, shakes, falls and gets a series of convulsions. She watches all this with ecstatic joy. Every convulsion of the dying man is "like a virile thrust to her. Her own body twitched and moved spasmodically." When he finally dies, ". . . she reached her own paroxysm."

This is no isolated example. There are others offered to adolescents in which the obscenity is also as much in the endorsement as in the book. Here is one endorsed by an "Internationally Famed Psychiatrist." The endorsement says that this book also is an "educational experience," that it shows a disease "medically known as satyriasis . . . based on one or more emotional traumas occurring in early life" and that such a person "will stop at nothing to gain his ends, not even murder." (Even medically that is entirely false.) In this book, girls are murdered, but the high point here is when the hero beats the heroine. She "enjoys the blows." "It was like the time she had watched the Negro being beaten and stoned and what she had felt then she was experiencing again." Sadism (or masochism) as sexual fulfillment—that is the "educational experience" in these books.

A medium influenced by crime comics and rivaling them in viciousness is bubble-gum cards. Children collect them and they are widely distributed. I have quite a collection myself, contributed mostly by young children. They seem to have

escaped the notice of child experts. Here are some sample pictures on bubble-gum cards:

- 1) A baby sleeps peacefully in his crib and an enormous serpent hovers over his head. There is also a dark-skinned native brandishing a big knife.
- 2) A card entitled "Desperation and Death" shows a huge exotic bird clawing at the middle section of a native. Of course you are shown blood where the skin is torn.
- 3) A man is bound to a kind of pillory, his hands tied and stretched out in front of him. Another man with raised sword is about to cut off his hands.
- 4) A man is kicked, his shirt is torn and there is blood on his forehead.

To influence children's parents, bubble-gum makers use the same methods that the crime-comics industry uses. There is a little magazine for juvenile card collectors. One number announces a new "Wild Man" series. At the masthead it says: "Dedicated to Child, Church, Home, School, Community." It is reported that bubble-gum manufacturers have more than \$10,000,000 annual profits.

To some extent children's toys are a medium, too, and here the influence of comic books and other media is demonstrable. Toys are fitted into the school-for-violence pattern of child entertainment. For example, a central toy firm supplies many stores with toys. Its catalog has an elaborate chart showing what each toy "will contribute to development: mentally, physically, socially, vocationally." This is all tabulated for age and sex. If you look under "age group 2 to 4 years" you find holsters and guns, and more holsters and guns, some of which apparently contribute to the development of the child mentally, physically and socially, but not vocationally. One does not contribute at all, so evidently there are refinements in the education of children aged two to four which are not readily apparent. There used to be only about ten companies manufacturing

toy pistols, knives and other such weapons for children. Since the boom of television, however, there are almost three hundred of them.

In the playroom we have often observed children delighted to get a chance to play with different types of blocks and construction sets. When we ask them if they have ever done this before they say No. When we ask what toys they usually play with they customarily answer: guns.

The fight against violent toys by mothers (and grandmothers) is an old one. When Goethe in 1795 heard that a miniature guillotine was being exhibited at the Frankfurt fair he asked his mother to buy one for his six-year-old son August. But she wrote him:

All that I can do for you I like to do and it gives me pleasure. But to buy such an infamous murder machine—that I won't do for anything! To let children play with something so awful—to put in their hands instruments for murder and bloodshed—no, that won't be done.

What would the old lady have said about the present armament program for American children? Toys not only satisfy the child's imagination, they direct it. If we are really concerned about the growth of children's social feelings, we need a *disarmament* program for the nursery.

The violence which movies have been showing since the middle forties differs in quantity, quality and emphasis from the Jack London two-fistedness of the twenties. Canadian-provincial censors at a national convention have had the courage to say that sex in movies is a relatively minor problem, but crime and brutality is nowadays a major one. In some advertisements of movies the comic-book influence is noticeable.

The movie "Problem Girls" is advertised with the slogan "Nothing Can Tame Them!" There is a drawing beside the title showing a voluptuous girl hanging from her wrists which are tied together in typical comic-book fashion. She has long stream-

ing hair, is barefoot and seems to be clad in a clinging nightgown. Next to her is a woman who is punishing her with a water hose. The whole setting has nothing to do with punishment or correction. It is strictly a perverse, sexually sadistic scene, of the type sold surreptitiously as obscene photographs.

Some time ago I saw a movie which had this episode: A young woman was nursing her baby; a man tears the baby away from her, throws it to the ground and kicks it away, then he hits the young mother over the head with a fence paling, knocking her over, and kicks her off the scene.

Sometimes children pattern their behavior after movies plus comic books. I saw a ten-year-old boy in the Clinic who had a long list of misdoings in school. He had pushed a little girl down an entire flight of stairs, which he got from the movies, and he twisted little girls' arms behind their backs, which he got from comic books. He did not tell me that as an excuse. He felt as guilty about his fantasies as about his acts.

Hollywood has been surprised that abroad some of its movies based on good books have been banned for minors. That happened, for example, in Sweden, despite the famous titles of the books. Of course it all depends on the ingredients of the movie. Swedish parents objected to too much violence (plus sex) for their children. Great Britain, Australia and other countries followed suit in attempts to keep movie violence and sadism away from their children. Recently a conference of British and American exchange teachers took place in the American Embassy in London, to discuss the effects of American movies on children. The headmaster of a London school spoke of the bad values these films taught his pupils. An American teacher made the typical defensive argument that the children could distinguish between entertainment and truth. This fallacious argument is heard frequently. Fiction and fact are not totally separated; there is a dynamic relationship between them. In this instance a British teacher answered that even many adults in England felt that the values in the movies

applied to American life in general. All such criticism of American mass media is played down or goes unreported in the American press. It would be important for the public to know about it.

Some movie writers look in crime comic books for new tricks. For instance the producer of the movie serial "Atom Man vs Superman," which was shown in about half the movie theaters of the country, is said to be "an avid reader of the comics, from which he gets many of his ideas."

Frequently different critical standards are used when people criticize media. *Parents' Magazine*, whose publisher and some of whose advisory editors have been so defensive about comic books, says in a movie review: "A brutal whipping-scene prevents this from being a film for the children." In comic books this is a standard ingredient.

All the media have one characteristic in common: The mothers are fighting a losing battle with the experts. Many experts, self-styled and otherwise, say that children laugh all this off, or, if they don't, there must be something wrong with the children (not, of course, with the media). The book "*Parents' Questions and Helpful Answers*" by the Child Study Association of America gives the same stereotyped fallacies about radio programs that have been used to defend crime comic books: Eight-year-olds can take "a good deal of blood and thunder without any ill effects," it serves "as emotional outlet" and if a child is frightened by a program it is not the program that is at fault but "something more deeply personal." To a parent who asks about "trash on the radio" this book gives the helpful answer that it is like "folk and fairy tales." All this bad advice comes from the fundamental error that "the final judgment of values" is up to the child. That, of course, leaves it all to the child and then leaves the child helpless against adult seduction.

Quite apart from the mail I have received, I have polled hundreds of mothers on this and unless they repeat what experts

have told them in lectures or over the radio or in articles, they feel the way Mrs. Walter Ferguson expressed it in her column "A Woman's View": "Every thinking mother knows how these outside forces (comics, movies, radio and TV) have influenced her family. . . . Today most children use their leisure to look at Westerns in movie theaters, to pore over unfunny comics which picture criminal activities or to listen to the same sort of thing over the radio. When television becomes as widespread as radio we can expect it to make a profound impression upon American children. . . . None of the women I have talked with believe these things are good for children. They only hope the impressions left will not be too deep." The more the pattern of violence becomes violent, the more experts are quoted to defend it.

Unfortunately psychiatry—or rather, some of its modern practitioners—has taken a defensive attitude about crime and sadism in the various media. They have provided a rationalization for that which they should help to prevent. There are three reasons for that. One is that hardly ever are these pronouncements made on the basis of actual study or even knowledge of what is going on. The same psychiatrists who will spend three years and hundreds of hours with an individual neurotic patient will pronounce on what happens to children from a ten-minute inspection of comic books (if that) or pronounce on children's movie programs without ever having been to a Saturday matinee with a child audience and with children's programs. Like educators, teachers and clergymen, psychiatrists were unprepared and not adjusted to the new impact of mass media on children, and as a result they have made themselves part of the education for violence.

The second reason is an over-individualistic outlook. On the basis of what they know of individual cases, psychiatrists pronounce largely on crime, delinquency, war, social organization and world peace, leaving out all mass-conditioning and all historical, social and economic forces.

The third reason is that the psychiatrist, despite his formal training, still remains a member of the society in which he moves and, as the whole crime comics issue has shown, is not so immune from the social pattern as he may think.

Television is on the way to become the greatest medium of our time. It is a marvel of the technological advance of mankind. The hopes it raises are high, even though its most undoubted achievement to date is that it has brought homicide into the home. Its rise has been phenomenal. For every set in 1946 there are now (1953) more than two thousand. Television has a spotty past, a dubious present and a glorious future. That alone distinguishes it from crime comic books, which have a shameful past, a shameful present and no future at all.

Many people do not realize fully television's immense potentialities. That seems to hold true for some of the producers and, in the ascending line of power, the sponsors and advertising agencies as well. There have been some plays, news programs and documentaries which one can hardly forget in one's adult education. They are still experimental, but they vibrate with possibilities. There have been excellent children's shows, like Chicago's "Zoo Parade," "Mr. I. Magination," "Uncle Lumpy," "Mr. Wizard," "Kukla, Fran and Ollie," "Paul White-man TV Club," etc. Some good children's shows do not have a long life, or their time gets cut down. A survey conducted by Harold B. Clemenko, editor of the magazine *TV Guide*, shows the two programs most favored by parents for their children, "Magic Cottage" and "Mr. I. Magination," were discontinued. "Captain Video," most objected to by parents as making their children "nervous," stayed on. This sort of thing is what makes parents dismayed and they write letters to people, papers, magazines or the stations to try to get the good programs back. But the question is not so simple.

The trouble with television is that it has no vision. Formulas and felonies triumph over everything else. According to Nor-

man Cousins, "the standardized television formula for an evening's entertainment is a poisoning, a variety show, a wrestling match." What more could anyone want? For one thing, a fuller exploitation of the possibilities. It would be quite wrong to blame the television industry alone for that. A medium cannot be better than the life it mediates. There was once an excellent program called "Rebuttal." Its purpose was to give people who in these tense times are under attack by supermen on subcommittees a chance to be seen and heard. This program lasted only for a few weeks. It was not the public nor was it the television producers who did not want to continue it. It was the lawyers of the various people under attack, who advised their clients not to commit themselves.

It is the bad things that television does that unfortunately command most attention. About one third of all programs for children have to do with crime or violence. Untrained viewers may miss this proportion because as in crime comics they do not realize that crime is crime and violence is violence even in the patriotic setting of a Western locale or in the science-fiction setting of interplanetary space. If you are looking for a realistically televised violent act your chances of finding one are statistically greater if you look for it on a children's program. Two different children told me excitedly that they saw on TV how molten iron was poured on a man. I asked each of them why that was done. Neither knew precisely. One said he guessed it was done for revenge; the other guessed it was done because the man knew too much. That is about the extent of motivation in these violence-for-violence's-sake shows. It is not the motivation, but the violence itself that makes the impression.

New York Times critic Jack Gould (not letting himself be sidetracked by the false theories of the psycho-publicity men) has very correctly objected to such scenes on the children's-hour television screen as "the gruesome choking to death of a girl." But children have seen this hundreds of times in comic

books and the harm is not that they find it "thoroughly unpleasant" but that they have been conditioned to get a thrill out of it and find it thoroughly pleasant.

One might assume that the violence on television is just an addition, an adjunct, to make stories more exciting. But not only does the whole structure of these shows contradict this, there is also internal evidence. An experienced TV writer gave an interview about the way it is done. "You have to work backwards," he says. "You're given a violent situation and you have to work within that framework." In other words, the violence is not an addition, but the hard core of what the television makers want. This revelation of technique is also an answer to the false view that so many people subscribe to, that the violence is there because it is something people want and children need. The brutality in TV crime shows is so insidiously glorified that many people do not recognize it as such any more and accept it as smart. Here, for example, is the famous detective who "fights crime without gun" and "can break a man's arm without wrinkling his gray flannel suit" (or his conscience). He also knows how to "break a bad guy's back if necessary." All this of course, just as in comic books, "as a method of self-protection."

The deductive approach to crime and crime detection, the Sherlock Holmes touch, has been supplanted on television to a large extent by sadism. We asked a nine-year-old television captive, who in telling about the programs seemed to distinguish between mysteries and thrillers, what the difference was between them. His reply: "Mystery is like a heavy amount of suspense, as much suspense as can go, like somebody comes with an axe in the dark and chops somebody up. A thriller is not too much suspense, but quite enough to give you a lot of thrill." To such children classic stories like the "League of Red-Haired Men" or "The Purloined Letter" would seem incredibly trite.

For the child television-viewer, as for the comic-book addict, a sweet smiling happy girl, who is not vicious, not scared, not the helper or victim of a murderer, is just silly or perverse. A

series of stills of what is done to girls on TV is good raw material (no pun intended) for the cultural anthropologist or sexual psychopathologist. I have found that children from three to four have learned from television that killing, especially shooting, is one of the established procedures for coping with a problem. That undoubtedly is one of the effects of television on children. It is a most unhealthy effect.

Murders, gunshots and violent acts are as plentiful on TV as raisins in a raisin cake—in fact some producers seem to think they *are* the raisins. An average child who is no particular television addict and takes what is offered absorbs from five to eleven murders a day from television. If he would confine himself exclusively to adult programs, the number would be less. It is obvious that the amount of violence offered children by TV derives partly from crime comics. More important than the amount, however, is the qualitative aspect, the connection of violence with other things—family life, sex, daily living, absence of tragic feelings, etc.—and the details themselves. A cartoon in *Pathfinder* magazine with a woman sitting before a television screen saying, “This one had a happy ending—she finally murders her husband . . .” is not just a joke. In a serious vein, the television version of *Macbeth* with the head cut off on stage and later shown in close-up is typical of the crudity of style and cruelty of content. Whether viewers are emotionally disturbed by such things or whether they are made indifferent and callous by them, they certainly are not elevated or introduced to Shakespeare. The Ford Foundation’s Omnibus presentation of *King Lear* showed Gloucester’s eyes being gouged out in such a way that *Cue* magazine commented, “It was the most ghoulish and revolting bit of business we have ever seen on any stage or screen.”

In the face of criticism and in an effort to ward it off, the television industry, again following the example of the comic-book industry, has made widely publicized pompous announcements about a code. The code is pure in that it does not seem

to have affected anything or been affected by anything. It is strictly on paper and not on the TV screen. But even the code puts the emphasis on matters which have not done the most harm, namely the specific crime-murder-terror formula. The code and what has been done about it reminds one of the patient who, when told by a physician that he must cut out wine, women and song, replied that he would follow the advice at once, and begin by giving up song.

Outside of the regular television critics, some of whom have stressed the harmful aspects, the literature about television and children is not very helpful. It can be summarized by saying that nearly all these authors want us to study the child, but not the television industry. It emphasizes the individual child (always abstractly) and the individual family, not the general aspects of what television actually does. The assumption seems to be that when anything goes wrong the child must be morbid but the entertainment normal. Why not assume, if such sweeping assertions must be made, that our children are normal, that they like adventure and imagination, that they can be stimulated to excitement, but that maybe something is wrong with what they are looking at? Why assume that they need death and destruction instead of assuming that their interests can be pleasurably directed toward constructive things? And why not assume that they have a latent curiosity about sex which can be satisfied decently instead of being directed toward sadism?

In one brief article "Television for Children," for example, I find no less than three times the phrase "indiscriminate viewing" on the part of the child. That reveals an anti-child attitude. If you repeat three times that the child "views indiscriminately" you might say at least once that what is there to view is offered indiscriminately. If a child is too fascinated by television programs the author suggests diverting his interest "with cookies and milk." I do not know whether the author, like the rest of us, indulges occasionally in any vices; but if he does, would he stop in the middle for "cookies and milk"? No wonder he comes to

the standard conclusion: "Actually there is nothing to fear about what TV is doing to our children," the familiar comic-book formula which has served the industry so well.

Unfortunately some psychiatrists and child specialists have written in a similar vein, again as with comic books. Never before in the history of medicine have physicians been so sanguine about children's health as these psychiatrists, without any evidence from clinical research, are about the effect of mass media. One psychiatrist writes dogmatically that normal children are never seriously disturbed by routine experiences such as television. Why should something so new, so experimental and still so unroutine as television be accepted as "routine"? It is an intrusion into the home which from a mental-hygiene point of view still needs scrutiny and correction. He further states that the important thing is that television affects different children differently. That of course is the cheapest truism. The point is what do some television programs have *in common* that is, or may be, harmful to *many* children? To say that the average child is "in no way basically disturbed" introduces the loaded word *basically*. Is it "basic" if the child suffers from nightmares or if he begins to steal or if his character imperceptibly develops in the direction of an obtuse attitude toward the feelings of others? It is my belief that as physicians, especially when we make pronouncements affecting millions, we should have more regard for questions of prevention, whether the harm to be avoided is "basic" or not.

He also discounts the effect of television murder stories on children: "TV murders do not represent death to the pre-school child. . . . Many children take this synthetic death, blood and murder in their stride and remain undamaged by it. . . . They take it quite casually . . . in order to become well-adjusted one will have to face the common experiences that are a part of the child's life." Is it really a common experience of children to see a bloody death?

The present director of the Child Study Association of Amer-

ica has stated: "Parents have found that the children can watch a half-dozen murders in one evening, get up, kiss mama and daddy good-night, go upstairs, sleep soundly and the next day get their usual grade in spelling." That is a most unclinical statement to make. They could do that if they had early stages of tuberculosis or some other diseases, or if psychologically they had been very badly affected by the "half-dozen murders." This is a crude superficiality in defense of violent television shows. Parents often do not recognize the harm done to children by crime shows. The director of Child Study goes on to say that if children get into trouble over sights on television "these children were sick before they ever saw a TV program." According to these people it is always the rabbit that starts the fight with the dog.

Lay writers have considerable difficulty in steering their way through the vast generalizations of the experts without becoming confused or getting misled. Robert Louis Shayon tried to do this in his book *Television and Our Children*. He comes to the conclusion that "what television can do to your child will depend on what your child is, what you are educating and guiding him to be before he looks at television." I think it is the other way around: What television can do to your child will depend on what television is, what you are allowing it and guiding it to be before it gets to the child.

My studies of the effect of television on children grew out of the comic-book studies naturally—I might say inevitably. More and more children told me that they did not read so many comics because they were looking at television. A few children gave up comic books for television. Many combined both. The study of the effect of television on children is more difficult and I marvel at the glib generalizations that have been made about its harmlessness.

We have used with television the same individual and group methods we used with comic books. It is significant how a show is reflected in a child's mind, what his memory vividly

retains and what he represses and brings up in later sessions. I found especially revealing what children draw when asked to draw anything they have seen on television. Typical of many others is the drawing made by a sweet little girl of six. The color scheme was massive red, a lot of black and a little blue. She said: "I drew the picture of a man in his hotel room, and someone came in from the window and he had a stick in his hand and he's going to hit the man over the head." And this is exactly what she had drawn, with even the room number over the hotel-room door.

To evaluate the time spent by children before the television screen is difficult. It varies so widely with different children and with the same child that statistical averages are misleading. I have seen a number of children who apparently spent as much as four or five hours a day.

Sometimes it is not easy to determine the influence of television with precision because so many children have been conditioned in similar directions either before or at the same time by comic books.

A ten-year-old boy sent to the Clinic for fire-setting brought us some of his comic books: *Detective Comics*, *Planet Comics*, *Master Comics*, *Space Western*, *Batman*. He said he liked TV and looked a lot at "Roy Rogers," "Sky King," "Captain Video," "Space Cadet," "Captain Midnight," "Space Patrol" and "Flash Gordon." A little thing like fire-setting did not rate with him.

During the last few years, when television has been growing so fast, children are sometimes not sure themselves whether they get some of their ideas from comic books or from television. Even so, many observations can be made. The later hours and going-to-bed problem has certainly become exaggerated in most families. I have heard about quite a number of nightmares which are without question attributable to TV.

Some children get overstimulated by violent programs. This happened to Ernie, a ten-year-old boy of superior intelligence much overprotected by his mother. She told me: "He gets very

excited sometimes. While looking at television he gets so excited he smacks the girls.”

We lead children on to look at the wrong things, then blame them if they develop a craving for what they see. Much as I have searched for it, I have been unable to find that crime and violence programs satisfy psychological needs in children. One would have to assume that the need for outlets of violent aggression in children has suddenly tremendously increased. My findings in this respect corroborate Helen Muir, children’s book editor of the Miami *Herald*, when she makes a distinction between “the real needs and desires of children” and “just the superimposed synthetic so-called needs which are not needs but cravings.” She goes on to say, “Sure, the children want TV. And if they started smoking marihuana they’d want marihuana.” Mrs. Muir also puts the finger on the worst harm that many so-called children’s programs do to children. They fill them up “with false values that confuse and trouble.”

I have found that with regard to simple values necessary for social orientation, television has confused some children, troubled others, and made still others (who are not supposed to be affected at all) callous and indifferent to human suffering. Whether such a child then commits a delinquent act or not often depends merely on incidental causes. That was the case with thirteen-year-old Anthony who was a truant and who was questioned in the Hookey Club. He said: “I spend about six hours a day on television. My favorite programs are ‘Lights Out’ and mysteries.”

“What happens?” he was asked.

“People get murdered. People kill for money, for property or for power. They kill women because they are going to tell on them or something. It may be the girl friend of the murderer or a crook that may be murdered. Sometimes the girls do the killing: They shoot them. There is one program where the man needed pills, he had a bad heart. The girl took the pills out of his reach, and moved his phone so he couldn’t call anybody,

and his pen and pencil so he couldn't write anything, then he died. She was married to him. She killed him because she was tired of him." (This was related in a matter-of-fact way, as if describing a self-understood circumstance.)

He went on: "I like the mystery programs very well. It is all more or less the same thing. The women or the men kill for money, power or they might get tired of a person or they love somebody else. There was a program where this man, he was old, and this girl he married was young. She fell in love with the first young man that came around, so she shot her husband."

About seven months later this boy was arrested for stealing. I examined him again and closed my report to the Children's Court with these words: "This is a typical case of a boy who has spent many hours a day looking at television programs, many of which glorify crime, violence, lawlessness, and depict these scenes in emotionally alluring detail. Under these circumstances, it seems to me not surprising that a boy succumbs to temptation and I believe that the adult world is more to be blamed than this individual child, who has made a good effort to adjust himself. I should point out to the Court that the observations of the bad effect of television programs on this boy were recorded on the chart several months before he was arrested for these delinquencies."

That the good ending of a crime story cancels out the effect of all previous mayhem in a child's mind is as untrue for television as it is for comic books. As a six-year-old boy told me about television, "the cowboys shoot the bad guys, the bad guys shoot the good guys."

The ideas children absorb from endless TV viewing are certainly not healthy. A nice little girl of ten was undergoing a routine examination at the Clinic, having been referred by a social agency. She was the kind of child who does not play and every day after school for hours she watched TV. I asked her, "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

"A nurse," she said, looking at me with big serious eyes.

"Why?" I asked her.

"So that I can poison people" was her immediate reply.

For some children, television has one good effect, in contrast with crime comic books, which have none. I have not seen it mentioned, but children express it often in one way or another. Television gives a feeling of belonging. Adults get that when they not only hear but actually see in their own living room a famous star performing or a prominent figure interviewed on programs like "Meet the Press." Children get the feeling not only that they are taken into the adult world on the screen, but share the same entertainment with older children and adults—even with the neighbors! This is of course totally different from the solitary overheated entrancement of comic-book reading. It is a positive and good effect of television and it shows how wrong the television industry is in identifying itself with the comic-book industry in its publicity.

Childhood used to be the time for play. Here television has made tremendous inroads. Children look at television (and/or comic books) and often do not play any more, or their playing time is markedly shortened. They get no positive constructive suggestions for their play. What they see on TV (except for a very few children's programs, such as Frances Horwich's "Ding Dong School") they cannot act out or imitate or work through in their play. If they would it would be dangerous play, hurting themselves or others. This, I believe, interferes to some extent with their healthy growth, because play is an important factor in normal development. Premature cessation of play in favor of the passivity of the television screen cannot well be made up for later on. The stereotyped repetitive stories create rigidity and poverty of ideas and fantasies. The two-gun heroes usurp the stage of the dreams of childhood. Instead of the spontaneity necessary for mental health there is a regimentation of feelings. That children imitate what they see on the television screen is undoubted. There have been cases where five-year-olds have shot at the screen with their father's gun to join in what they

were looking at. An adolescent girl strangled a six-year-old girl with a stocking after watching a television mystery program. Boys have broken younger kids' bones, arms or legs with wrestling holds that they have learned from rough television shows. Juveniles have shot at girls in imitation of scenes on television. Of course those who prefer to hold that "deeper causes" (usually undemonstrated) rule out all precipitating, conditioning and inducing factors, bitterly contest the fact that watching television may lead to imitation.

Children's play on the street is now of a wildness that it did not have formerly. Children, often with comic books sticking out of their pockets, play massacre, hanging, lynching, torture. The influence of comic books—and also of television—is discernible in the nature of these games. Normal play has, I believe, curative forces. But if it gets too violent, these curative forces are extinguished.

The tales that children tell nowadays are also apt to show the influence of comic book-television lore. Three boys, ages ranging from six to eight, recently told the story that a man had grabbed one of their pals, had tied him up, beaten him, cut off his head and buried him in a vacant lot. Policemen were digging patiently for some time in the place the children pointed out, until it was finally realized that it was all made up. The details of the plot should have indicated to them that it was all comic book-television stuff. Even the police played the role assigned to them in comic books!

In television cases as in crime-comics cases I have found a law to be operative. All those factors seemingly insignificant or trivial coming from the child's previous life or from other media enter into the chain of causation if they tend in the same direction. Television has added one more agency in the bombardment of children with negative incentives.

There are many points of contact between much of television as it is today and crime comic books. The form is different, but the content is similar. As one child said in a study

by Dr. Florence Brumbaugh, director of Hunter College Elementary School, television programs are "really comics that move."

It is the faults of television that are like crime comics. Inherently the two are nearly opposites. Television is a miracle of science, on the constructive side of the ledger one of the greatest practical developments of scientific principles of physics. Comic books, on the contrary, are a debasement of the old institution of printing, the corruption of the art of drawing and almost an abolition of literary writing. Television is a signpost to the future. Crime comics are an antisocial medium that belongs in the past.

Television has taken the worst out of comic books, from sadism to Superman. The comic-book Superman has long been recognized as a symbol of violent race superiority. The television Superman, looking like a mixture of an operatic tenor without his armor and an amateur athlete out of a health-magazine advertisement, does not only have "superhuman powers," but explicitly belongs to a "super-race."

Like comic-book figures, crime-television heroes seem to have minds that function only when they draw a gun, prepare to kill somebody or foil someone else's plans. There is no doubt that the highly seasoned fare of children's programs has interfered with the reading of children's books. In one public library the children's department figured that, on account of television, children took out a thousand fewer books than they had the year before. Classic books, mutilated in comic-book form, have been adapted to the television screen. The passivity induced by both television and comics have some similarity. Parents have often told me that without comic books they could not keep their children quiet, and more than one woman has told me what one mother expressed like this: "Give him his TV set and he's perfectly content if he never goes out"—but she was referring to her husband, not to her son.

The public has judged television much more harshly than

it has comic books. That comes from the fact that adults actually see television, whereas as a rule they have no idea what comic books their children really read, or what is in them. When a famous TV star was criticized for plunging necklines, she pointed to the millions of girls in "bras and panties" in children's comics. Some time ago the television industry launched a high-pressure sales campaign. Parents were bombarded with big advertisements that played frivolously with both parents' and children's feelings: "There Are Some Things a Son or Daughter Won't Tell You" and "How Can a Little Girl Describe the Bruise Deep Inside?" This was to show how badly children need television sets. One expert proclaimed that children need TV for their health just as much as they need fresh air and sunshine. His column was dropped from one newspaper as a result, although he had taken his endorsement back. This whole TV campaign brought an outcry of indignation from the public. But what the TV industry and its experts had done was minute compared to the harmful and unscientific promotion campaign the crime-comics industry has been waging for years.

Of course television and crime comic books also meet when comic books are based on television programs. Take the example of *Captain Video*. This comic book is certainly as bad as other crime comics. There is a lot of assorted violence. Morbid fantasies are conjured up for children, like the one that suddenly mankind's legs do not function: "All of us have recited our theories and admittedly found them inapplicable! There is no hope for mankind's regaining the use of its lower extremities!" The treatment for this infirmity costs "one million dollars for each patient." The hero has a "dreaded electronic ray gun whose scintillating bolt results in complete paralysis." There is the superman cult of the "one man alone to stem the tide of frightening destruction, guardian of the world." The injury-to-the-eye motif is not missing, either.

When *Pathfinder* magazine wrote about this television show it had an illustration with the legend: "Gory after-dinner crime

for juveniles defeats happy puppets” and classified the program as “a juvenile crime show.” To this the advertising agency objected, writing (in a letter published by *Pathfinder*) that the program “is not classified, nor has it ever been classified, in the crime category.” They wish to call it a “science fiction” show. That is the familiar comic-book-industry alibi. Anyone who wishes to do anything about improving television programs either from within or without must first realize that scientifically not the disguise but the content is decisive, that crime is crime, paralyzed legs are paralyzed legs, violence is violence and torture is torture, whether the time and place are now and here or in the remoteness of science fiction.

What is the future of television, especially for children? It should be almost impossible to keep it as bad as it often is now. More and more people will demand television instead of tele-violence. In contrast to the crime-comic-book industry with its hacks and hackneyed product, there are many gifted, wide-awake young men and women in the television industry anxious to show what they and the medium can do. I have spoken with some of them and I know that they would like nothing better than to devote their lives to the further development of television as a medium of entertainment, information and instruction. I doubt whether a medium like television, pregnant with the future, and commanding such superior personnel, can be held back in the long run.

The greatest obstacle to the future of good television for children is comic books and the comic-book culture in which we force children to live. If you want television to give uncorrupted programs to children you must first be able to offer it audiences of uncorrupted children.

XIV

The Triumph of Dr. Payn

Comic Books Today and the Future

“When the remedy has been found, the next generation has difficulty in understanding how the old conditions could ever have been allowed.”

—Sir John Simon

When you first meet Dr. Payn, he is in his laboratory wearing a white coat. On a couch before him lies a blonde young woman with conspicuous breasts, bare legs and the lower part of her skirt frazzled and in tatters, as if she had been roughly handled in strenuous but unsuccessful attempts to defend her honor.

Next you see him lying in wait for another beautiful girl. He cuts off her shapely legs. You see her lying on the cobblestoned street without her legs while he rushes off on the sidewalk carrying them in his arms. Then you see him gloating over these lovely legs in his laboratory. The newspapers announce: **BUTCHER-KILLER AT LARGE!**

Two pictures show the police completely baffled. He stalks another beautiful girl and cuts her hands off: "Not my hands! Oh, No, Please Not my . . . OHHHH . . ."

Next you see the girl lying hand-less on the sidewalk and again: "Performing his deed of unspeakable horror, Dr. Payn scurried off carrying his **GHASTLY BURDEN!**"

His third exploit belongs to the psychopathology of hair fetichism. He cuts off a beautiful girl's long blonde hair: "**HAIH!** Lovely, perfect hair!"

Finally, through a most unlikely accident, he dies, and the police find him dead.

When the decision of Governor Dewey and the lack of decision of Senator Kefauver had given the green light to the comic-book industry, they went ahead full steam. Now no holds are barred. Horror, crime, sadism, monsters, ghouls, corpses dead and alive—in short, real freedom of expression. All this in comic books addressed to and sold to children.

To whom is such a story as Dr. Payn addressed? This comic book has letters from readers. One says: "I enjoy your books very much and read them in bed at night before I go to sleep. I am eleven years old." When I read this I could not help being reminded of a typical defensive article about comic books in *Parents' Magazine* in which the author says: "Maybe I

just don't catch all these subtle symbols of eroticism, sadism and worse which comics reputedly contain."

In the lust-murder story of Dr. Payn the criminal was a doctor. In another comic book the criminal is a police lieutenant. He kills his wife by deliberately running over her with his car. At the end he is undetected and completely unsuspected, and presumably lives happily ever after. Six pictures on one page show this policeman-murderer lighting and smoking a cigar, walking triumphantly, with the full knowledge that crime does pay.

He goes free because at the police station an innocent man is tortured into making a confession. The child reader is spared no details. The man is punched in the stomach, hit in the face, his arm twisted behind his back.

"It went on like that for hours! His clothes were torn—his nose bleeding—his face battered and bruised! Other detectives took over! They worked in shifts—pummeling—threatening—cursing!"

"HE [the innocent man] LAY SPRAWLED ON HIS STOMACH, BLOOD TRICKLING FROM HIS TOOTHLESS MOUTH! THE BONES IN HIS NOSE WERE SPLINTERED! HIS SCALP HAD BEEN OPENED—HIS HAIR WAS MATTED WITH STICKY OOZE! HE SOBBER—"

"N—NO—MORE! I . . . I . . . DID IT! P—PLEASE! sob . . . sob! NO—MORE!"

The very last picture in this child's story shows the real murderer, the police lieutenant, smoking his cigar and "cleaning his wife's blood from his car."

Stories like this are now so typical that I could go on and on.

A very sexy-looking girl tells her husband that she is pregnant. He opens his jacket and the girl looks at him, horrified. He tells her: "You *couldn't* be expecting a child, now, *could you?* Not very *well*—when your husband is a ROBOT!"

A young soldier "keeping watch in his foxhole in Korea" is exterminated by a ghost: "The fangs and talons of the evil witch sank deeper into the jugular vein and then came out,

withdrawing rich red blood. The young man sank forward, face up, dead!”

A painter ties the hands of his model to the ceiling, stabs her and uses her blood for paint. (Flowing blood is shown in six pictures.)

An “autopsy” is performed on a man who is still alive and screams.

A man provides murder victims for his wife, who drinks their blood. He grabs a newsboy for her and she says over his bound body: “His throat is as white and soft as a swan’s! So tender and youthful!”

Scholars will be interested in this new version of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*:

THE DEATH SCENE (Hamlet speaking):

Fear not, queen mother!
It was Laertes
And he shall die at my hands!

. . . Alas! I have been poisoned
And now I, too, go
To join my deceased father!
I, too—I—AGGRRRAA!

In one comic book “the top horror artist in the entire comic book field” is confined in the “state home for mental defectives” where his little son goes to visit him. Dialogue at the gate between the guard and the boy:

Guard: “Yes, I know it’s visiting day. But he’s still too violent.”

Little boy: “I—I—just wanted to tell him he’s won the ‘ghoul’ for the most horrible comic book script of the year.”

At a time when accusations of bacterial warfare cloud the international scene, children here in the United States and, through export, in many other countries, are instructed that the United States Government is carrying out secret researches

on bacteriological warfare and that it is practiced on colored natives:

A man goes to a Government building marked "RESEARCH DIVISION." A scientist in a white coat tells him: "You are aware of the secrecy of these experiments. They are more deadly than the A-bomb!"

Showing him a syringe, he goes on: "There's enough minute bugs in this to kill everything in New York! Pollute drinking-water! Poison masses—"

The man tells his girl: "Get a load of this Liz. Bacterial warfare!"

He goes to Africa to practice on the natives there what he has learned in the U.S. Government Research Building.

In one picture you are shown a book with the title *Bacterial War*. This is not propaganda abroad, but the comic-book industry at home.

The stories of murder go from the simple through the gruesome to the weird. One man kills his wife with a poker, another shoots a wolf which is his wife, a third becomes transformed into a huge crab and eats her.

The preceding examples are ordinary samples such as can be picked up at any newsstand or candy store. This is what the comic-book industry is putting out right now under what might be called the Kefauver-Dewey charter. Forgotten are the announcements of self-control and self-regulation. Anything goes. And all this is possible because many well-meaning adults live under the skilfully induced illusion that comic books have been getting better and better. Supposing you were to read in a history book that a distant nation in times gone by gave this kind of literature to its children to read. Would you not be forced to conclude—whichever historian you follow, whether Gibbons or Toynbee, Spengler or Engels, Croce or Commager—that here was a civilization poisoning its wellsprings?

One afternoon, after analyzing the content of the latest batch, I was riding on the subway. Across from me was a nice-looking

little boy, totally immersed in one of the bloody thrillers I had just gone over. I found myself in a reverie. In my fantasy I was addressing a huge audience of parents, doctors, legislators and officials. This is what I was saying:

Set the children free! Give them a chance! Let them develop according to what is best in them. Don't inculcate in them your ugly passions when they have hardly learned to read. Don't teach them all the violence, the shrewdness, the hardness of your own life. Don't spoil the spontaneity of their dreams. Don't lead them halfway to delinquency and when they get there clap them into your reformatories for what is now euphemistically called "group living." Don't stimulate their minds with sex and perversity and label the children abnormal when they react. Don't continue to desecrate death, graves and coffins with your horror stories and degrade sex with the sordid rituals of hitting, hanging, torturing. Don't sow in their young minds the sadistic details of destruction.

Set the children free! All they want is to play, to learn, to grow up. They want to play games of adventure and fun, not your games of wars and killing. They want to learn how the world goes, what the people do who achieve something or discover something. They want to grow up to raise families with homes and children and not revel in morbid visions of Batman and his young friend. They want to grow up into men and women, not supermen and wonder women. Set the children free!

But I caught myself. Ridiculous! Who would listen to that?

I had asked for a law, a simple sanitary law to protect children under fifteen. The children needed it, the parents wanted it, the legislators drafted it, the intellectuals opposed it, the pillars of the community slapped it down. What, I asked myself, happened in the past? How did the protection of children progress historically? I went to the library.

In ancient times children were sacrificed bodily. Henry Bailey Stevens writes in his book *The Recovery of Culture*:

“The success of the blood sacrifice [of infants] was undoubtedly due to the fact that it was sponsored by the thinkers, the leaders. They could argue from evidence which they could claim to be scientific. . . . Instinctively no doubt many wholesome people recoiled from the practice. But the intellectuals could talk them down scornfully. Let us imagine ourselves in Carthage when the priests of Moloch are demanding the sacrifice of infants. Suppose that you object. . . . Your associates will suspect you of sentimentality and irreverence. All the political, the social, the educational and the religious world will be arrayed against you. You will be a part of a society that has become infected.”

A century ago boys and girls of five and up had to work as chimney sweepers. They got skin diseases from the soot. The proposal was made that the practice of sending children up chimneys be stopped. You can well imagine what their employers would have answered if they had had the benefit of the type of experts the comic-book industry has now. They would have said that only those children who are predisposed get skin diseases, that it is the children's fault if they want to satisfy their need of motility by going up chimneys, that children who don't go up chimneys get skin diseases, too, and besides what better outlet for aggressive instincts is there than to climb up chimneys and do battle with soot? There being no such experts then, the Earl of Lauderdale stated that if something were done for the children by law through an Act of Parliament, private initiative for being benevolent and helping children would be affected and would disappear. And the Religious Tract Society joined in the anti-reform movement and urged these stunted and sick children to wash well on Saturdays, attend Sunday School and read the Bible: “Thus you will be happy little sweeps.” It took the British Parliament ninety years to control this legally.

In 1842 children as young as six, and even five and four, had to work in coal mines in England. The parliamentary report

about these conditions was illustrated with pictures showing children and nude adults doing their back-breaking work in narrow, low, mine passages. John W. Dodds, in his book *The Age of Paradox*, records how Lord Londonderry, a coal magnate, was indignant—not at the facts, but at the pictures. He was afraid they might fall into the hands of refined young ladies. So, as Professor Dodds writes, “change came slowly.”

The history of medicine records a controversy about whether young children who have to do industrial work at night need sunlight for their health. It is not yet a hundred years since a physician had to defend in detail that sunlight is good for the immature organism, and that at least part of the day children should have sunlight in order to remain healthy. He was in just such direct contradiction to the employers who made these children work long hours at night as I am to the comic-book publishers. Similar arguments took place on the question of whether children need regular meals, sleep, how old they should be for heavy work and how many hours they should work. Nowadays the intellectuals are just as anxious to guard the freedom of children to read crime comics. In those days, as Lord Elton writes, they were “eager to preserve the liberty of children of six to work eleven hours in the mines.” Then they used to quote Bentham; now they quote Freud.

Huntington Cairns, in his treatise *The Child and The Law*, describes how difficult it was to make Federal laws regulating child labor, how a law involving interstate commerce was proposed, and how the Supreme Court held this unconstitutional. (Justice Holmes dissented, as did Justice Frankfurter in the Winters case.) Cairns quotes a poem published at that time referring to the 5 to 4 decision of the Supreme Court:

Five reverend, wise and gentle men
Have thrust the babies back again.

Child labor today is still a problem of legal control. One constitutional amendment on child labor has been waiting for the

necessary state ratification for a quarter of a century. Only recently attempts were made in the New York State Legislature to introduce a law according to which children would have to work without provisions for any minimum age, maximum hours, or protection of health and welfare. The battle between profits and progress goes on.

The flood of new and bad comic books continued to rise. The psychological erosion of children continued. There was no denying the victory of Superman and the triumph of Dr. Payn. Then an important event took place. As reported by *Life* in "Newsfronts of the World": "The Pacific Fleet Command has banned the sale of most war comic books in ships' stores on the grounds that they are too gory for the American sailor." Military authorities had questioned comic books before, on the grounds of avoiding sale of material that "goes beyond the line of decency." There had been some question of control and some bickering with the industry. But this time there was a clear action, to protect *adults*. If these war comics which are widely read by children are too "gory" for sailors in an actual war, why is it permitted to display and sell them to boys and girls of six and seven?

We think it is progressive to follow the judgment of children and go by our own feelings of wishing not to be interfered with. In other words, we go by what children think and by what we feel, instead of going by what we think and what children feel. We neglect the corrosive effect of external factors, such as comic books, in favor of more and more abstract speculations about intrinsic factors. We pretend that hostility and destructiveness are ingrained in the child and need expression, and fail to recognize what is instilled in him from outside. We teach these wrong concepts to young doctors and teachers who on that basis in turn make wrong observations, confirming our false conceptions. At a conference of kindergarten and first-year teachers in New York, under the auspices of the Board of Education, this official recommendation was given: "It is neces-

sary to stress the normality of hostility; all children feel it and it is psychologically and biologically sound. Teachers must appreciate also the importance of accepting hostility without attaching moral values."

You cannot accept hostility without moral evaluation. For hostility in itself causes a moral conflict in the child. A society which itself adopts the standards and point of view of comic books is bound to arrive at false conclusions.

Thus my studies had almost completed a cycle. I had started from comic books, had gone on to study the needs and desires of children and had come to adults. I had learned that it is not a question of the comic books but of the mentality from which comic books spring, and that it was not the mentality of children but the mentality of adults. What I found was not an individual condition of children, but a social condition of adults.

The conflict that I came across occurs on different levels. There is first the conflict between the child and the comic book. This becomes an emotional conflict within the child himself. While there are parents who are delighted that comic books keep their children quiet, that is a short-range view because comic books have led to many conflicts between parents and children. There is further the conflict between the mothers' good sense and the experts' dogmas. On a wider scale a conflict developed between active local groups of women's clubs, mothers' clubs and parent-teacher organizations and their inactive national leadership. In 1949 the president of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers described comic books "as a chief influence of today on the minds of the young." What have they done about it?

Underlying it all is the conflict between the surge of violence today, of which comic-book violence is just a reflection, and a new morality, as expressed in the dissenting opinion of the U. S. Supreme Court in the Winters case, which wants to stem the tide of education for violence.

The way people reacted to comic books is how they often

react to other things, too. First they did not know—but they thought they did; then when told, they did not believe it; then, when shown, they said that's an exception; and when that was disproved, there was an endless stream of excuses: that things were getting better and better, that the evil would voluntarily improve itself, that singling out one evil was just looking for a "scapegoat." Thus they can keep not only their physical comfort but their intellectual comfort as well.

People neglect the pre-violent manifestations of the trend toward violence. They forget what the philosopher Erwin Edman said: "It does not take long for a society to become brutalized." Comic books are not the disease, they are only a symptom. And they are far more significant as symptoms than as causes. They shed some light on the whole foundation of moral and social behavior. That, I began to feel, was the most positive result of our studies. The same social forces that make crime comic books make other social evils, and the same social forces that keep crime comic books keep the other social evils the way they are. Even the arguments to defend them are the same for both.

Whenever you hear a public discussion of comic books, you will hear sooner or later an advocate of the industry say with a triumphant smile, "Comic books are here to stay." I do not believe it. Someday parents will realize that comic books are not a necessary evil "which, but their children's end, naught can remove." I am convinced that in some way or other the democratic process will assert itself and crime comic books will go, and with them all they stand for and all that sustains them. But before they can tackle Superman, Dr. Payn, and all their myriad incarnations, people will have to learn that it is a distorted idea to think that democracy means giving good and evil an equal chance at expression. We must learn that freedom is not something that one can have, but is something that one must do.

One evening at the Lafargue Clinic a young woman came to

see me. She was the mother of a boy who after some delinquency had been referred to the Clinic and been treated there. She told me that the boy had got into trouble again, this time picked up with a switchblade knife. He was now in a youth shelter and she had been told he would be sent to a reformatory. I remembered her as a hardworking woman who had given the best care and education to her children that she could. She was very distressed and I tried to console her. Then I called in one of the social workers and we made plans to get in touch with the authorities, either to prevent his being sent to the reformatory or, if that did not work, to try to have him released from there as soon as possible. "I know your boy," I said to her, "and the Clinic will take full responsibility for him again." She thanked me and went out.

About an hour later when the Clinic was closed, I left the office. Walking through one of the corridors of the building I saw out of the corner of my eye a woman sitting on a bench crying. I recognized the mother I had spoken to. It was late, and I was tired, but I went over to her and took her back to the office.

By that time she had managed to control her sobbing, but she could not talk. So I consoled her again and told her we would do whatever we could. Then I added, "I know what you have done for this boy. Don't think that it's your fault."

At that she looked up, all alert. "It must be my fault," she said. "I heard that in the lectures. And the judge said it, too. It's the parents' fault that the children do something wrong. Maybe when he was very young——"

"Not at all," I interrupted her. "You have done all that you could. I have the whole chart here and we know it from the boy himself. You are a good mother, and you've given this boy a good home. But the influence of a good home is frustrated if it is not supported by the other influences children are exposed to—the comic books, the crime programs and all that. Adult influences work against them. We have studied that, and we

know good parents when we see them. So don't worry about yourself. It's not your fault."

She seemed to come out from under a cloud. She thanked me and got up to go. When she was halfway through the doorway she turned slowly. "Doctor," she said in a low voice. "I'm sorry to take your time. But please—tell me again."

I looked at her questioningly.

"Tell me again," she said slowly and hesitantly. "Tell me again that it isn't my fault."

And I did.

the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are aged 65 and over has increased from 10.5 million to 13.5 million, and the number of people aged 75 and over has increased from 4.5 million to 6.5 million (Office for National Statistics 2000).

There is a growing awareness of the need to address the needs of older people, and the need to ensure that the health care system is able to meet the needs of older people. The Department of Health (2000) has published a strategy for older people, which sets out the government's commitment to improve the health and well-being of older people, and to ensure that the health care system is able to meet the needs of older people.

The strategy for older people is based on the following principles: (1) to improve the health and well-being of older people; (2) to ensure that the health care system is able to meet the needs of older people; (3) to ensure that older people are able to live independently; (4) to ensure that older people are able to participate in society; (5) to ensure that older people are able to live in their own homes; (6) to ensure that older people are able to live in their own communities; (7) to ensure that older people are able to live in their own homes; (8) to ensure that older people are able to live in their own communities; (9) to ensure that older people are able to live in their own homes; (10) to ensure that older people are able to live in their own communities.

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SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT

Wertham

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He has found an appalling lack of scientific method on the part of professionals who have for years paid no attention to comic books, although they are practically the only reading for many children. He believes that comic-book reading helps children to get rid *not* of their aggressions, as many "experts" state, but of their inhibitions.

It is important to remember that all Dr. Wertham's findings are based on a study of comic *books*, not newspaper comic strips which are required to observe the same standards of good taste as the newspapers in which they are published.

"The most subtle and pervading effect of crime comics on children," Dr. Wertham writes, "can be summarized in a single phrase: moral disarmament. It consists chiefly in a blunting of the finer feelings of conscience, of mercy, of sympathy for other people's suffering and of respect for women as women and not merely as sex objects to be bandied about or as luxury prizes to be fought over. They affect children's taste for the finer influences of education, for art, for literature, and for the decent and constructive relationships between human beings and especially between the sexes."

Dr. Wertham's suggested remedy, a public-health approach to legislation on the subject, must be seriously considered by all who claim to take the slightest interest in the mental health of our children.

Fredric Wertham, M.D., worked with Professor Adolf Meyer at Johns Hopkins for seven years, teaching and doing research. He was the first American psychiatrist to be awarded a research fellowship by the National Research Council. In 1932, he organized and directed the first psychiatric clinic in a major court where all convicted felons got a psychiatric examination, the results reported to the judges. Since then, his main psychiatric interest, aside from his private patients, has been the practice and organization of psychotherapy in mental hygiene clinics.

Dr. Wertham has been director of some of the largest clinics in the country: the mental hygiene clinic of Bellevue Hospital, New York, and also Queens Hospital Center. He has organized two free clinics — the Quaker Emergency Service Readjustment Center (devoted entirely to the psychotherapy of sexual difficulties) and the Lafargue Clinic, located in the heart of a slum area in Harlem, the first psychiatric clinic to be opened in that district.

He is the author of many articles and books, among them "The Brain as an Organ," and the best-selling "Dark Legend" and "The Show of Violence."

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Gordon Parks

*Rinehart
& Company, Inc.
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New York 16, N. Y.*

**Fredric
Wertham
M. D.**

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*the influence of
comic books on today's youth*

RINEHART

continued from front flap

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SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT

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Fredric Wertham, M. D.

*the influence of
comic books on today's youth*

SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT

by
*Fredric
Wertham, M.D.*

This is the most shocking book of recent years. And it should be the most influential.

Seduction of the Innocent is the complete, detailed report of the findings of famed psychiatrist, Fredric Wertham, on the pernicious influence of comic books on the youth of today. No parent can afford to ignore it.

You think your child is immune? Don't forget — 90,000,000 comic books are read each month. You think they are mostly about floppy-eared bunnies, attractive little mice and chipmunks? Go take a look.

On the basis of wide experience and many years' research, Dr. Wertham flatly states that comic books:

- Are an invitation to illiteracy
- Create an atmosphere of cruelty and deceit
- Stimulate unwholesome fantasies
- Suggest criminal or sexually abnormal ideas
- Create a readiness for temptation
- Suggest forms a delinquent impulse may take and supply details of technique

These are only some of the points raised — and documented.

Dr. Wertham also discusses many other deeply disturbing questions. He has found that comic books harm the development of reading from the lowest level of the most

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